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MY ACTOR-HUSBAND

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A TRUE STORY
OF
AMERICAN STAGE LIFE

NEW YORK
THE MACAULAY COMPANY
1913

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To

PROFESSOR CHARLES T. COPELAND

Of Harvard University

FOREWORD—A RETROSPECT

In presenting this autobiography to the public, the author feels it incumbent upon herself to impress upon her readers the fidelity and strict adherence to the truth, relative to the conditions which surround the player. In no instance has there been either exaggeration or a resort to imaginative creation. It is a true story with all the ugliness of truth unsoftened and unembellished. Nor is the situation presented an exceptional one. One has but to follow the career of the average actor to be convinced that the dramatic profession is not only inconsistent with but wholly hostile to the institution of marriage. Managers and actors alike know and admit this to be the truth—amongst themselves. What they say in print is, of course, merely so much self-exploitation. The success of any branch of "the show-business" is dependent on the bureau of publicity.

To one intimately acquainted with the life, the effusions of certain actors' wives, which

from time to time appear in magazines for women, are ironically humourous. They are to be put down as the babbling of the newly-weds or the hunger for seeing their names in print. To hear the wife of a star declare that she always goes to the theatre and sits in the wings to watch her husband act is to presage the glaring head-lines of a divorce in the not-far-distant future. If it be not now, yet it will come, for those players who go through life with but one, even two marriages to their credit are the great exception to the rule. The actor's life precludes domesticity and without domestic life there can be no successful marriages.

Every community has its stage-struck girls. Year after year the Academies of Divine Art turn out graduates like so many clothes-pins. Neither aspirant nor parent appears to question her fitness for the career to which she aspires. Both are ignorant of the conditions which confront the tyro or they have a wholly erroneous idea of theatrical life—ideas culled from the articles which appear from time to time in the magazines over the signature of a prominent actress. The average reader has no way of knowing that these articles are not writ-

ten by the actress herself, but by a needy scribbler to whom she grants permission to use her name, for the free advertising she will get in return. "My Beginnings," "Advice to Stage-Struck Girls Who Plan to Go on the Stage," etc., are alluring head-lines. The subject matter is a mass of glittering and trite generalities. Of the real conditions, the pitfalls, the drawbacks to be met, the outsider hears nothing. And when once in a decade a scribe dares to express himself truthfully concerning the moral atmosphere in the theatrical profession—(vide Mr. Clement Scott)—the air is rent with expostulations, denials and protestations from the members of "the profession." Interviews and letters pack the enterprising press. Many of those who protest the loudest have the least to lose.

It has been said that art bears no relation to morals: as well might it be declared that the blood bears no relation to health. Art must forever be imbued with the spirit of its delineator.

The moral status of the stage may not be a whit worse than that of half a dozen other professions. It is possible, but hardly probable. The very exigencies of the player's life make

for a laxity and freedom from restraint. And in no other profession are the lives of the individual members so intimately concerned. The popular contention that a good woman can and will be good under any and all circumstances is a fallacy. The influence of environment is incomputable. I believe that my little friend Leila was fundamentally a good girl: in any other walk of life she would have remained a good girl. I believe that fundamentally my husband was a good man: in any other environment he would have been a good husband. The fantastic, unreal and overstimulated atmosphere which the player breathes is not conducive to a sane and well-balanced life.

And if, in a ruthless rending aside of the tinselled illusions which enthrall the stage-struck girl, I have rendered a service, my own suffering will not have been in vain.

CHAPTER I

It was our first separation. All day I had fought back the tears while I helped Will pack his "Taylor" trunk. Neither of us spoke; once in every little while Will would stop in the act of folding a garment, and smile at me in approval. Then his arm would steal around my shoulders and he would pat me tenderly. . . . I would turn away, pretending to busy myself with other things, but in reality to hide the freshet of tears his silent expression of sympathy had undammed. . . . Will had signed with a star to play Shakespearean répertoire. The question of wardrobe was a source of worry, until I volunteered my services; I was a good needlewoman, and, from the sketches Will made, I was able to qualify as a full-fledged costumier. For days I had pegged away, refurbishing the old and making new ones, and sometimes Will would lend a hand and run the machine over the thick seams. . . . I once read that the women of the Com-

mune wove the initials of those they hated into their knitting; well, I sewed the seams of Will's dresses thick with love, and hope, and ambition . . . and dampened them with tears. . . . Then when the expressman came for the trunk . . . it seemed as if they were taking away a coffin. . . .

Not until that night, after we had gone to bed, and I felt Will's deep, rhythmical breathing beneath my head, which lay pressed against his breast, only then did I give way to my grief. I crept to the other side of the bed and turned my face to the wall—I shook with convulsive sobs.

Now and then Will would half waken, and would reach out and dreamily pat my face and smooth back my hair, as one soothes a sorrowing child. At such times I would hold my breath, and wait until he was again quiet. . . .

Every incident of our short married life passed in review before my burning eyes. We had closed our season late in April, and had come back to New York with less than seventy-five dollars between us. But what we lacked in money was more than balanced by our enthusiasm and illusion—the illusion of two young persons very much in love with each other. I

had been in New York only once before, and the thought of living in the great city, of becoming an integral part of it, made me thrill with excitement. Will and I stood on the front of the ferry-boat and watched the panorama; he pointed out the various tall buildings with an air of familiarity. When we passed close to a great ocean liner, which was being swung into her dock by two fussy little tug-boats, even Will got excited. He told me which was "fore," and "aft," and named various other parts of the boat which I didn't understand. When we had taken our last look, he tucked my hand under his arm and told me that one day he and I should take a trip abroad. . . .

Owing to the shortage in our money supply, we had decided to go to a theatrical boarding house. Will was depending on his father to send him an allowance throughout the summer, and while it would be sufficient for his needs, now that he was married—well, we should have a chance to test the saying that two can live as cheaply as one. Our marriage had been a secret one—besides the "star" and one or two members of the company, we had taken no one into our confidence. Will's family—his father, a sister and brother—his mother hav-

ing died about the time I came into his life—all were intolerant of the stage and its people. Though I was not yet a "really truly" actress, the fact that Will had met me "in the profession" would have prejudiced them against me; added to this was the fact that Will, himself a tyro, taking a wife at the very threshold of his career would not be looked at through our love-coloured glasses. The effect my marriage might have upon my own relatives never troubled me; my father and mother belonged to that great class of incompetent parenthood which brings children into the world without any actual love for them. Never questioning their fitness for child-rearing, they divine no greater responsibility than providing bodily necessities and a more or less superficial education. When, at the restless age of sixteen, I announced my determination to become an actress, there was some surface opposition, but no effort was made to enquire into my fitness for the dramatic profession, or the fitness of the dramatic profession as a career for any innocent and unprotected young girl. I had been highly successful as an amateur, and, as it was not necessary that I earn my own living, the stage appeared to their insapient minds an

interesting playground for a dilettante daughter. . . .

One week in a theatrical boarding house was all we could endure. I wonder why it is that the rank and file of the theatrical profession are at such pains to impress one another with their importance. The flippant familiarity with which they referred to "Charley" or "Dan" Frohman; the coarse criticism of their fellow-actors, which Will called "knocking"; their easy disregard of the conventions, especially between the sexes; a bombastic retailing of their own exploits, as "how I jumped on and saved the show, with only one rehearsal"; talking "shop" to the exclusion of every other subject in the world. I overheard one of the actresses at the next table say we were "very up-stage," which Will interpreted as "not sociable, and having too good an opinion of one's self." Neither of us was happy in our new surroundings, and I felt a sense of relief when Will suggested that we look for a furnished flat. I did not mean to be critical of my husband's profession—I endeavored to agree with him that every profession has its undesirables. We spent days in climbing narrow stairs to look at dark, closet-like apertures with no ven-

tilation; even the strength-sapping humidity of the streets seemed fresh in comparison. At last, we found something less undesirable than the others. The building was new, and the apartment in the rear gave upon a row of private houses with small yards; there were flowers and a few trees—little oases in a desert of brick and mortar. The janitor told us there were three rooms: the bedroom was an alcove affair, divided from the parlor by pea-green portières; the kitchen beyond was as large as the pantry in our house at home; and the furnishings—! The whole outfit might have been removed from a Seventh Avenue show-window, where they advertise "Complete furnished apartment for $49.99." The near-gold-leaf chairs were so frail that one was afraid to sit upon them. The general atmosphere of the parlor reminded me of the stage-settings one comes across in one-night-stand theatres. However, the vistas of the trees and flowers decided the momentous question. We paid a month's rent, then and there; it made a terrible hole in our last and only fifty-dollar bill, but neither of us worried much about it. For the next week the "show-business" was relegated to the background. We played "house"

like two children; we arranged and rearranged the furniture, and Will made a comfortable divan from two packing cases. We went out to market on Ninth Avenue and Will carried the basket on his arm. Then we tried our hand at cooking; Will carried off the honours for coffee—and hard-boiled eggs. I washed and Will dried the dishes—I can see him now, with an apron tied high under his arm, declaiming Shakespeare, and juggling with the landlord's dishes.

Our greatest problem was the lack of bathing facilities. We solved it by bathing in the wash-tubs; to be sure it was a bit hazardous standing on a sloping bottom, in danger of falling out of the kitchen window if one leaned too much to the right, or of toppling over to the floor if veering a bit too much to the left. But it was a bath, and, as Will said, preferable to the communal affair in the boarding house.

The summer passed all too quickly. Those were happy, happy days. . . . Sometimes the money market was tight—very tight; especially when Will's father was careless about sending Will's allowance. I cried bitterly the first time Will went to a pawn-shop; it seemed so

humiliating to have him do it. Will laughed, and said he regarded it as so much experience. Several times a week we donned our best clothes and made the rounds of the theatrical employment agencies. Will had had several offers during the summer, but we wanted a joint engagement; we had promised each other, when we married, that nothing should cause us to be separated. Will and I felt that to the enforced separation of married persons—the husband in one company, the wife in another—was due the great number of divorces in the theatrical profession. Our "star," when apprised of our marriage, had followed his good wishes and congratulations with a heart to heart talk with Will.

"It's all right, my boy," he said, "don't blame you a bit. She's a charming girl, and you're in love with her. If it were any other business but the show-business, I'd say you're a lucky dog, but—I'm going to be frank with you—a man or a woman in the theatrical business has no right to marry. It's all very lovely so long as you're together, but you can't *be* together. The chances are against it—you may be lucky enough to get a joint engagement one season, but the next season you're off on the

road, while she's playing in New York or in another part of the country. And what does this separation lead to in the end? You're a human being; you crave society, companionship; gradually you become weaned away and the inevitable happens. It's propinquity and home ties which make marriage a success; the life of an actor precludes domesticity. The very exigencies of his profession are not only inconsistent with, but hostile to, the institution of marriage."

When Will retailed all this to me, it sounded very big and very dreadful—and also very vague. Any danger from separation seemed in the far, distant future. . . . We agreed that a man and wife who permitted themselves to become estranged because of temporary separations knew nothing of real love—such love as ours, at any rate. . . . And now, with the summer going on apace and no joint engagement in sight, the fear assumed a tangible shape, the dread of separation hung over me like a pall. Will tried to reassure me by saying it was still early, and that we would hold out. . . . I believed what he said with a child-like faith. Indeed, I am not so sure that in these days I did not worship Will with the

same idolatry that I offered up to the Virgin Mary. . . . The whole world had merged into one being—my husband. My love for my husband was the absorbing passion of my life. Never happy in my home—my father had married a second wife—all the pent-up tenderness and passionate love found an outlet in my marriage. I sometimes wondered what had become of my ambition: this, too, had centred upon him. To be sure I meant to succeed as an actress, but I now thought of success only in the light of an assistance to him. It was already settled between us that I should be his leading lady, once he became a star. There should be no separations in our life. . . .

The weeks flew by . . . the summer waned. Will became less reassuring—he took on a worried look. I began to awaken of mornings with a sickening, intangible apprehension. After a while I stopped going to the agencies. It seemed so futile. And then, one day, late in the summer, when the theatres along Broadway had begun to remove the signboards from their entrances—it came. I knew something had happened when Will opened the door. Instead of kissing me at once, as was his habit, he passed on to the bedroom without looking at

me, saying, "Hello, Girlie." There was always something infinitely tender in the way he said these words, but today there was a new note in his voice. It took a long time to put away his hat and cane; then he came out and kissed me.

I was peeling potatoes. He drew up a chair so that our knees met; then he laid a hand on each shoulder and his fingers gripped me. We looked into each other's eyes. . . . After a while I managed to say, "Well, dear?" . . . and when he replied his voice seemed far away. I had the sense of returning consciousness after a blow. . . . I suppose I was a little dazed. . .

"Well, dear, I've signed with——" (he named a boy-Hamlet, well known throughout the middle west), "the salary is good and I'll play the King in Hamlet, Buckingham in Richard, and, if we do the Merchant, I'll be cast for Gratiano. . . . The best thing about it is the possibility of coming into New York for a run. The star wants to play Hamlet on Broadway, and I've been told he's got good backing. . . . So, little girl. . . . it may not be for so long after all. . . ."

Neither of us referred to the subject again

that day; neither did we try to make believe at being cheerful. We understood each other's silence. . . . and respected it. Outside the rain poured. Will stood at the window looking out, but I am sure he did not see the rain. . . .

All these details passed before my mind like moving-pictures. When at last I fell asleep, it was to dream the incongruous, disjointed stuff of which the actor's dreams are made; the sense of being late for a cue, or hearing the cue spoken, to realize that one is but half-dressed, or, again, to rush upon the scene only to find the lines obliterated from one's memory. . . . When I awoke, I heard Will in the kitchen; there was the smell of boiling coffee. For a moment there was no consciousness of my "douleureuse," then memory swept me like an engulfing wave. I cried aloud; then Will took me in his strong arms and kissed my swollen eyes, oh, so tenderly. . .

To recall the moments preceding and following Will's departure causes—even at this late day—a tightening around the heart. There were some red roses in a cheap glass vase on the mantle; Will had bought them from a street vendor that morning when he went out

for the papers. He had pinned one in my dark hair. . . . After many false starts, and bidding me, "Cheer up—it won't be for long," he closed the door after him. . . . It was our first separation.

CHAPTER II

THE red roses had withered; their crisp petals lay scattered over the mantel and about the floor. Stooping to gather them, I was seized with a giddiness; it dawned on me that I had not eaten for—I did not know how long. I went into the kitchen; the table lay as we had left it that morning at breakfast. There was his chair and the morning paper. I didn't cry—I felt only a heaviness, a numbness. Mechanically I set about to put the house in order; I realized that I must get myself in hand if only to please Will. I even managed a laugh at my own stupidity when, after neatly folding and placing my kitchen apron upon a shelf in the dish-cupboard, I hung the sugar bowl on a peg where the apron should have gone, and was drenched with a shower of sugar for my pains.

For several days I lived on milk, which the janitor sent up on the dumb-waiter. I could not muster sufficient courage to go out to mar-

ket. The sunlight mocked me—I resented the happy laughter of the family across the hall. The postman's ring, several days later, put new life into me. I knew the letter was from Will. I caught the postman almost before he stopped ringing, and, carrying the letter to my room, gave myself up to devouring it.

It was filled with interesting gossip about his opening, and gave humourous little side-lights of the star and personnel of the company. He bade me cheer up and not take our separation too seriously; he promised to write every day, and asked that I do likewise. I marked this precious epistle with a large "1" in blue pencil and tucked it away with the rose-leaves. Then I sat down to write—I wrote reams. It is wondrous the many modes of expressing "I love you." To distil those many pages, written in the thin, slanting hand of my girlhood, would be to extract the very essence of my life's romance—or, shall I say, tragedy.

I lived for the postman's ring. Sundays were the hardest to bear; there was no mail delivery. The weeks dragged on at snail's pace. Finally, loneliness and isolation drove me to a state of desperation, which, in turn, gave me the necessary courage to visit the

agencies. Will was reluctant to have me take an engagement alone; he made me promise that I would not take such a step without first consulting him. Indeed, had he but known it, the thought of again travelling alone in a theatrical company was distasteful to me; naturally sensitive and of a retiring disposition, my first season in the dramatic profession had left some unpleasant memories. It was difficult to accustom myself to enter an hotel lobby alone, or, if in company with other members of the organization, to hear our party referred to as the "troupe." The ubiquitous drummer lounging at the hotel desk regarded us with brazen audacity, and made audible comments. Then, to enter a dining-room unattended, either to be corralled at a table with the other members of the company, or, if seated elsewhere, to be further subjected to the advances of a "travelling salesman." Again, when walking to the theatre or to the railroad station, to see the townfolk turn curiously, regarding the players with a condescending smile, which curled the corners of the mouth downward as they whispered, "Show people." In larger cities these marks of opprobrium are less pronounced, but, nevertheless, exist. I resented this attitude towards

the theatrical profession until I became better acquainted with it. There be those who mistake liberty for license, and seemingly the freedom from restraint and the lack of conventionality, which the life affords, appear to be one of the chief attractions for adopting it.

However, it was expedient that I should work. I dangled before my willing eyes the reward of the future—that time when my husband and I should play together. I even planned that we should be an example to others in our devotion and high moral purpose; and so, by reducing expense of maintaining two establishments—the flat in New York and Will's living on the road—we should be better equipped to hold out for a joint engagement for the following season.

One morning, while waiting in the office of an agent to whom Will had introduced me, I was drawn into conversation with an actress whose photographs adorned the walls of the room. There was an air of importance about her, quite distinct from that of the other women who were waiting; these women wore an abject expression. They had relaxed the mechanical expression of "bien être" as the weariness of waiting wore upon them; in spite

of the make-up—more or less skilfully applied —their faces were drawn and strained. Their clothes, too, told of the attempt to keep up appearances. I felt a sympathy and fellowship for these unemployed; I wondered whether they too, were, by the force of circumstances, separated from their loved ones.

Miss Burton, the lady of some importance, broke my train of thought by precipitately asking me to "come and have a cup of tea." She assured me she would not let me miss "old Tom"—calling the agent by the familiar diminutive—and that having sent for her he was bound to wait. "It makes all the difference in the world whether they send for you, or whether you go to them for an engagement," she told me, with a sententious nod of her head. She was so bright and vivacious, and so wholly un-selfconscious that, for a moment, I was drawn out of my dreamy loneliness.

We went to a near-by hotel. "You take what you like," she said, summoning the waiter. "Beer for mine!"

I took tea.

While we sipped our respective beverages she told me about herself. She was a well-known comédienne—" 'soubrettes' they called

them in the old days," she volunteered. She had been with "Charley" Frohman off and on for years, and expected to go back to him.

"I've been in his bad books," she went on. "I had a good thing, and I didn't know it. When I think how I got in wrong all on account of those two big stiffs—!" My inability to follow her was probably expressed in my face, for she immediately rattled on: "You see, it was like this. When Jack and I were married we were in the same Company. He was what they call the 'Acting Manager,' travelled on the road and represented the New York office—understand? Well, the next year we didn't get an engagement together; he went off on the road and I created a part in a New York production. It was simply—hell! We used to make the most God-forsaken jumps, just to be together over Sunday. Why, once I can remember I rode all night in the caboose of a freight train to some little dump of a town where Jack's Company had played on Saturday night. Can you beat it? Oh, I tell you, I had it bad." And Miss Burton buried her feeling and her face in the stein of beer. After a pause she continued: "Well, the same devilish luck followed us the next season; we couldn't

dig up an engagement together for love or money—and we slipped a nice little roll to several of the agents, too. It just seemed as if managers were dead set against having a man and wife in the same company. Some of 'em acknowledge it right out loud, if you please! They claim a man and wife in the same company make trouble; either they want to share the same dressing-room, or the husband kicks if his wife gets the worst of it in the dressing-room line. Or, if the husband happens to be a manager, there's the temptation to favour his wife, and somebody else kicks up a row. Oh, they've got excuses enough, whether they're justifiable or not. Anyway, that's the kind of bunk you're up against when you marry in the profession. . . . Where was I? . . . Oh Well, after two seasons of separation, it dawned on me that Jacky wasn't so keen about making long jumps to see wifey; pretty soon I began to hear gossip—he was carrying some fairy's grip in the company he was with. Then I began to watch him . . . I caught him with the goods all right. . . . Exit, hastily, Jacky!" and, with an expressive wave of her hands to indicate his departure, Miss Burton called for another stein.

I fear I appeared a perfect idiot in the voluble little lady's eyes. I could not muster a comment of any description. Miss Burton, however, did not notice my omission, for she raced on with the same energy of expression.

"That blow pretty nearly killed Mother, I can tell you. I was in love with Jack all right. . . . It broke me all up to have him throw me down for a second-rate soubrette like that. I wish you could have seen it—one of these 'I'm so temperamental' kind of dopes. She threw him down as soon as she'd used him for what he was worth. . . . I took to the booze. Whew! I did go it hard for a while! That's what queered me with C. F. . . . Then, what d'ye think I did?" Miss Burton leaned forward to better impress me with the importance of her revelation: "I tried it a second time. . . . This one was an actor: one of those handsome, shaving-soap advertisement kind of faces—beautiful teeth, and workin' the smile overtime to show 'em! . . . Black curly hair, high brow, chesty—you know—the real thing in heavy men. . . . Mash notes, society ladies making goo-goo eyes at him, and forgetting to invite me to those little impromptu suppers. Ha! . . . don't ask me! It was worse than

the first. . . . No, ma'am, matrimony and the stage don't mix. They ought to nail over every stage door this warning: 'All ye who enter here, leave matrimony outside.' Yes, I know what you are going to say—that there are happy marriages among stage folks, and you'll name some of the shining examples. The domestic felicity of Mr. Great Star and his wife makes up well in print. But, wait awhile. . . . Have you finished with your tea? Let's step in the ladies' room—I'm dying for a smoke."

On our way back to the office, Miss Burton asked me about myself. When I spoke of Will, she turned sharply and looked at me with a hurt expression.

"Why, you poor kid! Why didn't you tell me you were married? Now, don't you let anything I said worry you a bit. Everybody is apt to draw general conclusions from personal experiences. There's always the exception to prove the rule. Besides . . . " She slipped her arm through mine and gave me a reassuring pressure.

The agent received her in his private office, and when she came out she was in high spirits. Calling me to her, she put me on a friendly

footing with the agent, who promised to keep me in mind. I thanked her for her kindly interest, and went home.

Desolate as the little flat was, I found strange comfort within its protecting walls. The power of Will's personality had impregnated the place, and I felt its soothing influence. I devoted the evening to writing to my husband a long letter, but, strangely enough, I did not repeat the conversation I had had with Miss Burton. That night I prayed that he and I might be the exception to prove the rule. . . .

The next day I visited another agency. The presiding genius was a corpulent person, with cold blue eyes which cowed at the first glance. She stood behind the rail which divided the office from the waiting applicants with an air of a magistrate dispensing justice not altogether tempered with mercy. There was something insolent in the way she shut off the opening speeches of the applicants with, "No, nothing for you today; nothing doing, Mr. Blank." Then, as a highly scented and berouged person entered, clanking the gold baubles of her chatelaine as she swished by, the majoress-domo swung open the gate and greeted her with,

"Come right in, dearie; I've been waiting for you." They disappeared into the sanctum sanctorum.

The little wizened lady who sat next to me snorted with impatience: "Humph! I suppose that means another half hour!" She fell to gossiping with a man whose very face suggested his "line of business"—that of Irish comedian. It was impossible not to overhear their conversation. The gorgeous creature who had been received with such open arms was a pet of the establishment, because of her generous and regular "retaining fees." She had been a more or less prominent society woman from Chicago; after a sensational divorce, she turned to the stage for the proper outlet for her superabundant "temperament." Willing to work for a salary upon which no self-supporting woman could exist, and able to dress her parts "handsomely," she found no difficulty in securing an engagement. The "retaining fees" no doubt facilitated her progress.

I afterwards learned from Will's experience that a cheque enclosed in a letter of application to one of these dramatic employment agencies stimulated their interest in the sender. And, even after an actor has made a "hit," it is good

business to lubricate the dispenser of gifts. I could not quite grasp the *modus operandi* until it was explained to me by Miss Burton. "You see, when a manager contemplates engaging a company, he sends to an agent for a list of names. Perhaps he wants a leading man or a character actor, and he may direct the agent to communicate with a certain actor whom he believes to be best suited to the part he has in mind. Now this particular actor may not be in the good books of the agent, or there may be another actor playing the same line of business who is regular and liberal with his 'retaining fees.' It is not difficult to understand which of the actors will be suggested—even cried up—to the manager." Our own experience had been to negotiate direct with the managers. But, in many cases, the managers themselves send the actors whom they engage to a favoured agent to complete the negotiations. In this way the agent is able to collect a week's salary from the actor.

The Irish comedian figured the average income of an agent who "placed" several hundred actors, with salaries ranging from thirty to three hundred dollars a week, at $5,000 a year. "And from the fish-hand they give you

when you come lookin' for an engagement you'd think *we* were the grafters—damned old parasites!"

When, at last, the lady agent returned from her conference, I timidly made known my wants. Perhaps I looked like a "non-retainer," as the comedian dubbed them, for the corpulent person looked me over suspiciously.

"Had any experience?" she broke in.

"One season," I responded.

"Well, you might leave your address," she snapped, and directed me to an assistant.

I went back to Miss Burton's friend. Mr. Tom was an Englishman, with the manners of a gentleman to commend him if nothing else. He greeted me pleasantly and asked me to wait. My heart bounded in anticipation. Presently he handed me a letter. I recognized the address upon the envelope as that of a prominent manager. I was told to go to his office, present the letter and return to report the outcome to the agent. I rushed off with my mind in a whirl. Already I was outlining a telegram to Will, telling him of my engagement. I began to plan how I should remake my last season's dresses to avoid the expense of a new wardrobe. Only once before had I gone direct

to a manager for an engagement. I look back upon the incident I am about to relate with amusement at my own expense. To anybody and everybody who is interested in the stage the name of Charles Frohman was and still remains a kind of magic. When it was determined that the stage was to be my avocation—I use the word advisedly, since I had never been taught to look upon any profession in the light of a vocation—I came direct to New York with the purpose of calling upon Mr. Frohman, and placing my talent at his command. I remember I dressed myself carefully. I even powdered my face heavily, to give the ear-marks of intimate acquaintance with the make-up box. When I entered the office in the Empire Theatre Building, the office boy was engaged in pasting newspaper clippings in a scrap-book. A pretty, pert girl was typewriting at the other end of the room. The office boy looked up enquiringly. I took my courage in both hands.

"Is Mr. Frohman in?" I enquired.

The boy shuffled into the adjoining room. I busied myself by looking at the photographs of the actresses which lined the walls; my heart was pumping fiercely, but I "acted" the

part of a young lady with plenty of *savoir faire*. The boy returned, followed by a middle-aged man who smiled pleasantly upon me.

"Mr. Frohman?" I ventured.

"Mr. Frohman is not in," he responded with a bland smile.

I was about to enquire when he was expected when I caught the reflection of the office boy in a mirror on the wall. He was winking broadly to the girl at the typewriter; I felt the blood rising to my face, and I fear I made a somewhat confused exit.

Will had many a good laugh over my credulity. I had come all the way from an Indiana town to see Mr. Frohman, and there was about as much chance of being admitted to his presence as the proverbial camel has of slipping through the needle's eye. Needless to say, I never mustered sufficient courage to call on Mr. Frohman again.

Today, however, I was forearmed. The manager to whom I had been recommended by the agent sent out word that I was to wait. A half hour later I was conducted to his presence. As I entered, he was seated in a revolving chair, one foot resting on a small sliding shelf on his desk, and a large black cigar in the corner of

his mouth. He did not rise, but nodded to me and motioned me to the seat opposite. While he read the agent's letter he removed his leg from the table and crossed it over the other. He was a short, heavy man, with a preponderance of abdomen. He had thick, loose lips, and his head was as round and as smooth as a billiard ball; his eyes were black and snappy, and threw out as much fire as the huge diamond he wore on his little finger.

"Well," he finally said, looking at me and shifting the big cigar to the other corner of his mouth, "that reads all right. So you're an *ingénue*" (he pronounced it as if it were spelled *on-je-new*), "are you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you look the part all right. . . How much experience have you had?"

"One season on the road with Mr. O'Brien's Company, but of course I've played in amateur theatricals for . . "

"Voice strong?" he bellowed, tilting himself back in his chair.

"Oh, yes, sir," I responded, using the loud pedal to prove my assertion.

"Don't sound like it."

"Perhaps not now, but—" I hesitated.

"But what?" he queried, smiling indulgently at me.

His smile gave me courage, and I answered truthfully: "Well, I think I'm a little scared just now."

"Scared? What of?" He removed his cigar while he spat out an end he had been chewing. Then he lighted a match and continued talking. "You don't want to be scared of *me*—I'm the easiest thing you ever saw. . . " Here he winked at me. Then for the next minute he puffed at his cigar and looked at me. "Stand up," was his next injunction. . . . "You're not very big . . you'll look the part all right."

"What kind of a part is it?" I ventured.

"Didn't Tom tell you about it? . . . It's a pretty part—one of them innocent country maidens that never saw the streets of Cairo—that kind. She falls in love with a villain who takes her to the great city, and then throws her down—hard. The poor girl's afraid to go back to home and mother, and just as she's about to commit suicide a good-natured sucker comes along and marries her. It's sympathetic and appealin'—goes right to the heart. Can't help but make a hit. Dressin' ain't much, and we expect to run all season in New York."

"What's the salary?" meaning to appear business-like.

"Twenty-five in New York, and thirty on the road."

I did not reply, for my mind was making rapid calculations. Twenty-five dollars a week, with the prospect of running all season in New York! Why, I should be able to pay my own expenses and lay aside a little besides.

"That's a good salary," began the manager, taking my silence for dissent. "If you make a hit, I'll raise it five. I tell you what I'll do: I'll give you a letter to the stage manager. They're rehearsing now. The dame we engaged for the part, way last summer, got married on the quiet, and has got to retire for family reasons." He winked at me again, as he took up his pen. I waited uneasily while he wrote. "Here's the letter," he said, moistening the flap of the envelope with his lips. "Now, run along and see Mr. Thompson at the Academy. He's the doctor." He rose by way of dismissal, and indicated a door other than which I had entered. I thanked him and assured him my voice was quite strong.

"You're a pretty little thing," he said as he

accompanied me to the door. "Pretty little figure . . what d'ye weigh?"

"I don't know really how much, but I think about one hundred and ten pounds," I answered with some confusion.

"As much as that? Where do you carry it all?" He ran his fat, stubby hands over my shoulders and down about my hips. His smile became a leer. Before I could realize what was happening he had taken me in his arms, and his heavy, wet lips were pressed against my mouth. His hands played over my body, and, though I struggled to cry out and to release myself, I was unable to do either. It seemed as if my senses were deserting me; then, the muffled bell of the telephone sounded, and he released me.

"Damn that bell," he said. Nauseated with disgust and fright, I cowered in the corner; he tried to draw my hands from my face, laughing as he whispered: "Like it, like it, do you?" Then with another oath at the continued call from the telephone, he crossed to his desk. "Run along now," he directed, without a look. . . .

I never knew how I found my way down the stairs to the street. I did not wait for the

elevator. I saw that people looked at me as I hurried along the street—whither I did not ask myself. Only when I collided with someone on the stairs did I realize that I had gone straight to the agent's office.

"Hello, little lady!" I recognized Miss Burton's voice. "My, we're in a hurry! For God's sake, child, what's happened to you? What's the matter? You look as if you were going to throw a fit! Here—let's go to a drug store."

After a dose of sal volatile, Miss Burton called a hansom and insisted on taking me home. I did not want her to accompany me. I wanted to be alone. When we were safely in the house I lost all control. She let me have my cry out without asking a question. Then, when I was calmer, I told her what had happened.

"The old blackguard! The old blackguard! I've heard that about him before. Why didn't you hand him one? Why didn't you smack his face?"

"I'll leave that to my husband," I replied with tearful dignity.

Miss Burton contemplated me between violent puffs of her cigarette. Then she shook

her head. "Um-um, girlie; no, sir . . you mustn't tell your husband."

"Why not?" I demanded.

"Well, if you tell your husband, and he's the man I think he is, he'll go straight up and knock the old beast down. That will get him in bad; this manager is a power and controls a dozen attractions, as well as theatres. Your young man may find it difficult to get an engagement in the future."

Miss Burton paused to allow the idea to percolate into my brain.

"Then there's another side to it. If you tell your husband and he does not go up and knock the fresh gentleman down, you'll despise him for it . . oh, yes you will! You would not acknowledge it even to yourself, but, way down deep in the bottom of your heart, you would never forgive your husband for not resenting the insult to you. . . . Better not tell him at all. . . . "

We both were silent for some time. I was struggling with a thousand conflicting emotions.

"You see, girlie, you've got an awful lot to learn. You're new to the game. That's the reason these things go so hard with you."

"Do you mean that 'these things' are a part —a regular part—of the business?" I began, with a burst of resentment. "I don't believe it! I can't believe it! I'm sure my experience was exceptional. I know that girls who typewrite for a living, clerks and even housemaids have unpleasant experiences, for I have read about it in the papers. There are bad men in all walks of life. I travelled nearly a whole season before I was married, and—"

I stopped short. My mind visualized a situation. When I joined the company in which I met my husband I was singled out for marked attention by the star. I believed this attention to be a kindly interest in a novice. It never occurred to me to question the intent and purpose. I was the understudy for the leading woman; the star had told me that I had exceptional talent, and with the proper direction I should develop into a splendid emotional actress. Quite often we would have private rehearsals—sometimes in the theatre, but more often in the star's apartment in the hotel. Invariably we rehearsed alone. I was flattered and sincerely appreciative of the star's efforts to develop my talent; we played scenes from Romeo and Juliet, and my star played

Romeo with such fervour that I quite forgot my lines. When the star's wife joined the company the rehearsals were suspended; it seemed quite natural to me that the star wished to devote his time to his wife. She was still a beautiful woman, though her face was sad and bore a discontented expression. She kept aloof from the Company, and it was said that she did not approve of stage-folk, especially the women. I wondered why she had married an actor. Later, when Will and I became friends, he questioned me about these private rehearsals; then I began to notice that he managed to drop in for a call on the star when we rehearsed at the hotel, or he would wait about the stage when we were in the theatre. This happened frequently as our courtship progressed. I recalled how, one day when Will was discovered in the wings, that the star called out to him quite irritably, "You were not called for rehearsal, were you, Mr. Hartley? You're not needed, and your presence makes Miss Gray self-conscious."

Shortly after that Will insisted upon announcing our betrothal to the star. I never went to rehearsals unattended after that, and the calls became less frequent. Soon they were

abandoned altogether. Now, for the first time, I understood Will's watchfulness—perhaps I understood why the star's wife had so sad a face. . . .

"And what?" Miss Burton repeated after me.

"I was thinking, that was all."

"Girlie, you'll never get on in the show business, unless . . . look here, I'm going to open your eyes to a few things that may come handy to you. . . . I've been on the stage since I was a kiddie; I was born in it. I made my first appearance in my mother's arms, and they say I never waited for cues, but yelled right through other people's lines. I grew up in railroad trains, hotels and theatres. I was wise to the game before I was out of short skirts. Anything I did was done with my eyes wide open. I was never stage-struck, like you, and so many fool girls who look on acting as a 'divine art.' I had to make my own living, and the stage offers a pretty good living if you are willing to play the game." Miss Burton looked at me significantly.

"Play the game?" I asked.

"Yes, that's just what I mean. . . . Virtue and chastity have about as much chance in the

show-business as that famous little snowball of purgatorial fame. I don't know of any other profession where immorality is a virtue. I suppose that's what you call a paradox. Virtue and success do not go hand in hand in this business—even our mothers recognize the truth of the statement and wink at it. Your average stage mamma values virtue in the ratio of the advancement its possession assures. Let any star or manager cast covetous eyes upon her daughter, let her but scent leading lady—or stardom—and she will not only lend herself to intrigue but encourage it. She knows the game; she knows that a girl, no matter how pretty, how talented, cannot get on in the show-business without 'giving up.' She's got to have money or influence, or both. I don't know what there is about the stage that brings out the baser passions, but I do know that it's rotten to the core. And the worst of it is, that the good is sacrificed to the bad. Girls like you are drawn to the stage by its illusion and romance. With others, it's the looseness, the freedom from restraint that appeals. There never was a woman with a screw loose in her moral machinery who didn't hanker for the stage. Why? Because it's a

convenient place to show goods. Every millionaire, every fur-tongued man about town looks upon the women of the stage as his legitimate prey. You've only got to mention the fact that you are, directly or indirectly, connected with the show-business, to lay yourself open to the advances of the male creature who thinks he is sporty. You may be as chaste as ice and as pure as snow, but the chances are against it, if you are on the stage."

I felt choked with indignation. "I don't believe you, I don't believe it's true," I stormed. "Look at such women as—" (I named a number of prominent women stars). "They are honoured and respected——"

"You mean their accomplishment, their art is honoured. Each and every one of these women has been grist to the mill. Do you suppose that side of it ever reaches the public? No, and what's more, it's none of the public's business. These women are successful. The price they have paid is their own secret. Don't misunderstand me—I'm not sitting in judgment on the women of the stage, any more than I would sit in judgment on you if you went wrong. I'm telling you the conditions that exist—conditions which every woman who

enters the theatrical profession has got to face sooner or later. You had your first experience today. . . ."

It had grown quite dark in the room. Miss Burton got up and moved about in the twilight. I almost hated her. I could not prevent myself from saying, "Do you think it is nice to befoul your own nest?"

She answered me gently: "You don't understand my motive, girlie. I wouldn't say these things to an outsider for anything in the world. Why, if a thing like this were to be given to the public, the whole theatrical profession would rush into print to deny it. There would be an awful noise, but *each and every one of them knows it's the truth, God's truth, and nothing but the truth.*"

We were again silent. Miss Burton sighed heavily.

"You know, girlie, if I were an artist I should like to paint my conception of the 'divine art.' The divine art is a soulless procuress; she takes your youth, your beauty and your virtue. She saps you dry, and, at the first signs of age, she turns you out."

Miss Burton stopped in front of the large

photograph of Will which adorned the mantel. After a lengthy scrutiny, she said:

"Fine head! Looks as if he would have made a good lawyer."

"He was educated for the law," I answered proudly.

Miss Burton looked out of the window with a far-away look. Then she came to me and took both my hands in hers.

"Little girl, why don't you persuade him to give up the stage and go back to the law?"

"Because he does not like the law, and because he has a great career as an actor ahead of him," I retorted, feeling myself on the verge of tears.

After Miss Burton had donned her hat and gloves, and stood with her hand on the door-knob, she spoke again:

"I'll see Tom to-morrow, and have him set you right with that old beast."

"Set *me* right!"

"Yes, for not showing up at the Academy. I'll say you got in a trolley jam, and when you arrived there they had gone. You can show up bright and early tomorrow—don't you intend to take the engagement?"

"Not if I never got another engagement in

my life!" I declared, with a wave of disgust passing over me.

Miss Burton drew me into her arms and kissed me impulsively: "Stick to that, girlie, and God bless you!" and she rushed off. . . .

I didn't sleep much that night. Early the next morning came a telegram from Will, saying he expected to be home on Sunday. His Company was to "lay off" and rehearse two weeks, preparatory to "the assault" on Broadway, as he expressed it. The knowledge that I should soon feel his arms around me acted like a tonic. My resentment against Miss Burton gave way to pity. Why were not all husbands and wives as much in love with each other as were Will and I?

CHAPTER III

THE boy Hamlet failed to attract the public. After two weeks on Broadway the notice went up. The Company was to reorganize, which, in this instance, meant reducing expenses—and "back to the woods." Will agreed to double the King with the Ghost for a small rise of salary and the condition that I be added to the roster. In return for my railroad fares I played one of the strolling players and the Player-Queen. The Company made one night stands only; we made early and long jumps to out-of-the-way towns, which Will declared were not on the map. The hotels were often so bad that we were driven to patronizing the village grocer, and to supplement our meals with chafing-dish messes. Through rain, snow and slush we plodded our way to the railroad stations; sometimes there was a hack and the women rode back and forth. The theatres were cold and the dressing-rooms filthy. The stage entrance invariably gave upon a foul-

smelling alley, and a penetrating draught swept the stage when the curtain was up. Once, after Will in the character of the King had been killed by Hamlet and lay dead upon the stage, he sneezed explosively. The audience appeared to enjoy the situation. But, in spite of the physical discomforts and the stultifying grind, we were happy—we were together.

By the end of the season we had saved almost three hundred dollars. Then Will played a few weeks with a summer stock company—a "summer snap," as it is termed—and in the autumn we were able to make a stand for the much-desired joint engagement.

When the Company gathered at the railroad station bound for a city of the middle West, it more resembled a family party than a theatrical organization. The manager himself played a part, and his wife was the lady villain. The comédienne and the stage carpenter were man and wife, and the leading lady—a girl not much older than I—was chaperoned by her mother. Will was the leading man and I the ingénue. There was the prospect of a pleasant season ahead. I smiled a little contemptuously when I thought of Miss Burton's terrible arraignment of the stage. She had

been unfortunate in her association, that was all, I told myself.

The comédienne and I shared dressing-rooms. She was a beautiful woman with a strain of Latin blood. I loved her from the first moment I met her. I was disappointed in her husband; her superior breeding and education caused me to wonder at her choice. Later, when I better understood the needs of the woman, I grew to like him; he was clean-minded and sincere—virtues I later discovered to be rare ones among actors.

It was about the second week of the season when our family party first showed signs of incompatibility. There had been some gossip connecting the leading lady's name with that of the manager, but as she was protected by her mother it appeared to me ridiculous and unwarranted. One night, as the curtain fell on the first act, the manager's wife ordered the leading lady's mother out of the wings. Immediately there followed a war of high-pitched voices which penetrated the walls of our aerial dressing-room. The curtain was held and the orchestra played its third overture.

During the wait Margherita, my dressing-

room mate, told me the circumstances of the case. The leading lady's mother was the "friend" of the "angel" of the Company; in this capacity she assumed privileges which were galling to the manager's wife. Adding to this the fact that her husband was too obviously interested in the leading lady, the outbreak was not to be wondered at. The manager himself was one of those round, flabby men, suggestive of a fat, spineless worm. Physique is often coindicant of character.

This night the mother had been more obnoxious than usual. It was her habit to stand in the wings while the manager's wife was on the scene, and by petty distractions to goad the actress to expression.

Gradually members of the Company were drawn into the dissension; it was an intolerable situation. Our sympathies were with the manager's wife, but we diplomatically held aloof. Matters finally reached a climax. One night during the performance there was a stage wait. In vain Will and the heavy man filled in the hiatus. The manager's wife had surprised the leading lady in the arms of her husband somewhere behind the scenes, and thereupon slapped the girl's face. A moment later

she came upon the stage to play her "big" scene; she was labouring under great emotion, and I thought she had never acted so well. In a speech to me (I played her daughter)—it was part of the stage business that I take her hand in mine; I am not sure that I did not press her hand in silent sympathy. She drew me towards her; in another moment the lady villain was sobbing in my arms, and there was an emotional storm not indicated in the manuscript of the author. I led her up stage as the house fairly rose to her splendid acting. When the storms of applause had died away we went on with the scene as if nothing had happened.

I wonder why it is that women invariably punish their own sex and exempt the man? Do they instinctively demand a higher code of honour from their kind while meekly acquiescent to the conventional license for men?

Subsequently the "angel" joined the Company, and, to all appearances, an adjustment was reached. For a time peace was restored. The leading lady assumed an air of injured innocence, and left off rouging her cheeks to heighten the effect. Then, suddenly—or gradually, I never realized how it came about—it became obvious to all that the leading lady

was "making a play" for Will. Her attentions became so marked that the men of the Company chaffed him about it, declaring the manager would presently challenge him to mortal combat, or—and what was more likely—discharge him from the Company. Will accepted their allusions in good part, but I observed the subject was distasteful to him. To me he called the woman "a little fool," and was irritated with being placed in so ridiculous a position. Indeed I think Will suffered as much as I did. Without being rude or boorish, there was nothing he could do to check her advances. She was planning her *début* as a star the following season, and made Will a proposition to become her leading man; she consulted him concerning the new plays which were being submitted to her, and planned for the current season special matinées of classic plays with which Will was familiar. She called him to preliminary rehearsal and discussions in her rooms at the hotel; sometimes, between the acts of the performance, called him to her dressing-room, where she received him in a state of *négligé*. New bits of stage business were introduced, or the old elaborated; she would run her fingers through his

hair, or prolong the kisses which the rôle demanded; or, in his embrace, she would draw her body close to his and writhe about him to a point of indecency. In countless, intangible ways she brought her blandishments to bear upon him. Will declared she was playing him against the manager, whose relations with her had become strained since his wife had interfered. In all things she was aided and abetted by her mother, who fawned on Will and made his position the more equivocal. My own emotions were confused; it was inconceivable that I should be jealous of the woman. No, the sensation she aroused was nothing more than disgust. To be jealous of my husband connoted a lack of faith, and he had done nothing to betray my trust in him.

Jealousy had always appeared to me a debasing and an undignified emotion. . . . I resented the position in which my husband was placed; I would not add to his discomfiture by hectoring. I had promised myself when I married that never should I be jealous when I saw my husband making stage-love to another woman—perhaps in the back of my mind was the hope that I should always be the other woman, his leading lady. Nevertheless,

I was determined to stand the test without flinching. It was high time that I began to realize that the conditions which confronted me were but a part of the game—the *game!* The word was reminiscent of Miss Burton. I fought down the suggestion blindly, passionately. . . . I began to dread going to the theatre; often, while I was making up, I found Margherita's eyes fastened wistfully upon me —they told how she longed to comfort me. Unhappily I could not talk about the thing which was troubling me. What was there to say? There are emotions which never find tangible expression. Then the idea of asking my husband to resign from the Company suggested itself. I endeavoured to look at the question from a material standpoint: it would not be easy to find another engagement in mid-season, besides, there were the expensive railroad fares back to New York—we were then touring California—and probably another separation. . . .

Perhaps it was the strain of hard travel, or it may have been the certainty of my condition which I had heretofore only suspected, or a combination of both, which made me lose my self-control. I had always believed

strongly in the influence of suggestion upon the unborn child, and the unclean atmosphere in which I was living preyed upon my mind until it became an obsession. I grew to hate the woman and her witch-like mother. We had had some racking railroad jumps, and the loss of sleep was telling on every member of the Company; the leading lady was stimulating on champagne. Her mother stood in the wings, bottle and glass in hand, and applied the restorative whenever the girl came off the stage. One night, under the influence of the wine, she became more brazen in her advances to Will; she took liberties which made even her mother, watching in the wings, gasp with amusement. Something she said *sotto voce* to her mother reached my ears. I began to watch her. As the act progressed she elaborated the detail with ever-increasing audacity, and, when the action required her to throw herself in Will's arms, she flung me a look of laughing defiance, coincident with a broad wink to her mother—old Hecate of the wings—then fed upon his lips like a vampire sucking blood.

I am not sure that I responded to the cue which some seconds later brought her into my arms. (We were fellow Nihilists under ar-

rest.) The contact of her hand against mine . . . Will told me afterwards he would never have believed me possessed of such physical strength. I choked her. . . . I drove my nails into her flesh. . . . I dragged her to the wings and beat her with my fists. . . . I vented upon her the long pent-up fury. . . . Oh, the shame, the ignominy of it! I, who resented a vicious influence upon my unborn child—I, its mother, had descended to the level of a fishwife! . . . It was Margherita who brought me back to consciousness; it was she who restored to me a modicum of my self-respect. I believe she was secretly pleased at what I had done.

That night, as she sat beside my bed, she told me something of herself. As a young girl she possessed a wonderful singing voice. Her parents—poor Italians—who came to America when she was a babe in arms, could not afford proper masters. She went on the stage to support herself, hoping to earn enough to pay for her musical education. Her beauty attracted a patron "of the arts"; at least, that is the way he was referred to in the newspapers. But it was not Margherita's art that he cared about—it was the woman. He con-

sidered his money a fair exchange for her body; Margherita was not willing to pay the price. She struggled on, and one day, after several years of hazardous existence, she found herself stranded in a far Western city without money, without friends. In a state of despondency she had walked to the outskirts of the town, and there in a lonely wood she sat down to fight out a choice between life and death. In a moment of emotion she burst forth into song; her troubled soul found solace in Gounod's *Ave Maria.* At the end her voice broke, and she sobbed. A hand was laid on her shoulder. It was a big hand, strong and sinewy. The man that went with it was big—"big all the way through," Margherita said proudly. They were married not long after; ever since he had remained at her side, helping to fight for a clean career . . . making her life's work his. . . . Dear Margherita! I can see you now, with your glorious black eyes, your coronet of raven hair with the poppies over your pretty ear. . . . Oh, the pity of it! Weakened by the hardships and privation her life entailed, she died a few years later. . . .

When Will came into the room that night, he held a paper in his hand. It was our resig-

nation. His eyes twinkled with humour when he told Margherita that he was taking the bull by the horns, and sparing us the ignominy of dismissal. I was glad to see he was not angry with me. Then Margherita whispered something into his ear. He came to the bed and took me in his arms, and what he said concerns only a man and wife. . . . Margherita stole away, but before she went she kissed us both, and there were tears in her eyes.

On the way back to New York, Will and I sat hand in hand looking out at the monotonous stretch of desert-land. "I'm glad to have it over—I'm glad that's out of our life," he reiterated, pressing my hand. "It was rotten!" Suddenly he burst out laughing. He continued long and sonorously. "Do you know, girlie," he said, "do you know that with a little more fullness of figure and a pair of two-inch heels, you'd make a grand Lady Macbeth? Phew!" and he laughed again.

CHAPTER IV

THE question of bearing children had given me many a bad hour. My husband felt that the coming of a child, at the outset of his career, would be a burden and a handicap; once he was established and could afford to maintain a home, it would be time enough, he declared. He felt that, at best, children born and reared in the theatrical profession were the victims of unnatural conditions. It was not practicable to carry a young child about the country, and, if left behind, to the care of either relatives or hired attendants, the child was robbed of its natural protection. Obviously I must make up my mind to separate from one or the other—my child or my husband—until the little one was old enough to travel.

Here arose another knotty problem. Children are little human sponges; they absorb the atmosphere of their environment. A stage-child is no more immune to the vicious influ-

ences about it than to a scarlet-fever germ. Should I then be willing to expose my child to dangers of more far-reaching consequences than physical ailments, and at a time of life when character is formed? My husband and I discussed these problems at length, and finally concluded that, since the inevitable had happened, the wisest course was to make the best of it. How many children, I wonder, are conceived in the same spirit? How many births the result of accident? How few planned with the wish to bestow the best of one's flesh and spirit upon the little stranger? Can the influence of unwelcome conception upon the child itself ever be computed? May not criminal tendencies and moral delinquencies be traced to such a source? If, at the beginning, I were guilty of misdirected sentiment, I set myself to right the wrong as the weeks grew into months. I no longer chafed at separation; I lived in a kind of spiritual exaltation. My plans and dreams of the future were now transferred to the coming of my child.

Will was so fortunate as to secure another engagement almost immediately. His success led to the opportunity he most desired, and in

the early autumn he played his first engagement as leading man of a New York production. The Company opened out of town; in theatrical parlance this is what they call "trying it on the dog."

Our boy was born during Will's absence. It must have been very hard for Will to have the nervous strain of a first night's performance and the worry of my illness at the same time. I had gone to the hospital alone. Will had made the arrangements before he left town. He said he would feel better if he knew I was in skilled hands and not at the mercies of a lodginghouse-keeper. It seemed cruel to be alone at such a time. I cried a little when the big, cheery nurse held my boy for me to kiss. . . . I wanted Will's arms around me as I had never longed for them before—or after. . . . The little chap had black hair like Will's, and his forehead bulged in the same way. I had always admired Will's forehead. . . .

Baby was six weeks old when his father first saw him. I laughed when he held the boy in his arms—he appeared so awkward. After a successful New York opening, the play settled down for a run. We moved from our furnished room to an apartment. Will found it

difficult to sleep with a crying baby in the same room. With the coming of the child, and the "front" Will's new position demanded, it was hard to make both ends meet; for a long time I did the housework except the washing, but when my health began to fail Will made me hire a servant.

Will was very fond of our little boy. Even as a small baby, the child showed his preference for his father; he would stop crying the moment he heard Will's voice. Indeed, I believe that when temptation lured him in her most attractive form it was the child who held him close to me.

Temptation there was plenty; his success had been unqualified. The critics hailed him as a young man with a great future. His pictures began to appear in the magazines and in the pictorial supplements of the Sunday papers. He joined an actors' club, where he dined on matinée days. Will's family developed a pride in him, hitherto carefully suppressed. They had shown decided disapproval of our marriage when it became expedient to announce it to them. My introduction to the family, during the week our late-lamented Company had played Will's home city, was strained and un-

satisfactory. Now, however, the sight of the family name in print gave unalloyed joy to Will's father, who collected newspaper clippings for Will's scrap-book with more zeal than did Will himself. Will said this sudden interest reminded him of a story he had heard at the club. It ran like this:

A handsome young Irishman of humble parentage had long yearned for the footlights. Unable longer to restrain himself, he confided his ambitions to his mother. Now, the old lady was an ardent church-goer, and looked upon the stage as a quick chute to perdition.

"Jimmie, Jimmie, me boy! To think you'd want to be an actor! To think you'd want to bring shame on your old mother, this disgrace on your dead father's good name!"

The old lady rocked herself to and fro in her grief. In vain Jimmie endeavoured to soothe her. Finally the idea occurred to him.

"But, mither, mither, darlin'," he caressed, "I'll not bring disgrace on your name—you know actors always change their names when they go on the stage, and no one will ever know who I am."

The old lady stopped her moaning and was silent for a moment.

"But, Jimmie," she protested, "Jimmie, supposin' you became a gr-r-e-at mon, supposin' you became a great lion, with your pictures in all the papers—and adornin' the fences . . . then, Jimmie, how'll they know you're me son?" . . .

It was at a matinée that I first saw Will in his new part. It was the first time since our marriage that I had not heard his lines or helped him with his costumes. He had told me all about the play, and I knew the cue for his first entrance almost as well as he himself. My heart thumped so hard and fast I feared my neighbour would guess who I was. His entrance was greeted with a burst of gloved applause, accompanied with such exclamations as, "There he is!" Isn't he a love!" . . . "Just wait until you see how he can make love!" I confess I hardly knew whether to be proud, or indignant. The familiarity with which they discussed him grated on me; I resented the proprietary tone. Then I smiled at my silliness, for I realized that this very interest made for popularity, the most valuable of the actor's assets. I listened to the gush of the matinée

girls, and their discussion of the private lives of theatrical people with a good deal of amusement.

Coming out of the theatre, I heard one woman ask another whether Will was married. I wondered what difference that would make in his popularity.

After the matinée I went back to Will's dressing-room. Will had planned what he called a little junket. We were to dine together at a restaurant—a pleasure we could not often afford. While Will washed up I told him the nice things I had overheard. I predicted he would become a veritable matinée idol—a term which he scorned. There were some letters lying on his make-up table. I picked them up idly; Will followed my action.

"Read them," he said. "You'll be amused. They are my first mash-notes." There was so much roguishness in his smile that I laughed back at him. Some of the letters were innocent enough, written in girlish hand, with requests for autographs and autographed photographs. One or two asked Will's advice about going on the stage, and there was one from a tooth-powder firm, wanting the right to use Will's picture in which his teeth showed. There

was one—a violet-scented note on fine linen, written in the large loose vertical scrawl so much affected by smart women—without signature. It ran as follows:

"If you will pardon this somewhat unconventional method of making your acquaintance, my dear Mr. Hartley, I shall be most happy to have you join me at tea, after the matinée, at Sherry's (other drinkables not excluded). I was present at the opening night of your play, and was quite carried away by your splendid acting. Where *did* you learn to make love? I have occupied the right hand proscenium box every Saturday matinée since the opening. Isn't that a proof of my devotion? Do I flatter myself that I have caught your eye once or twice as the curtain falls? I invariably dress in black and wear gardenias. If you are interested, you will have no difficulty in identifying me. For family reasons I withhold my name for the present. Do come, Mr. Hartley."

As I folded the letter and replaced it in its cover, I recalled that Will *had* glanced towards the right hand proscenium box several times.

"I think I'll put you on a car and send you home," began Will, but something in his voice belied his words, and I made him an impudent *moué*. "How do you like being married to a

matinée idol?" Will asked, giving the final touch to his dress.

I did not reply; I was asking myself the same question.

CHAPTER V

WILL made friends easily. Perhaps it were better to use the word "acquaintances." At any rate it was not long until he received more invitations than he could accept. He was called on to give his services for charitable purposes, but I noticed these hostesses never received him in their homes. It must be said that Will rarely accepted an invitation which did not include me, though I often realized I was invited as a necessary evil. After supper the guests invariably played poker, and I knew nothing about cards. The late hours sapped my strength, and my boy always wakened early in the morning. Sometimes the suppers were held at a well-known restaurant, like Rector's or Martin's. I had not the proper clothes for such occasions; it was imperative that Will dressed well, and I did not want it said that his wife was shabby. The other women wore wonderful gowns and much jewellery.

After a winter's round of these parties, I was

able to distinguish one particular set from another. There is a smart set, a fast set and a loose set which, though none of them can be said to be strictly "in society," form a kind of brass-band appendage or fringe to it and differ one from the other only in their gradations—or degradations—of moral laxness. It is the loose set to which the actor is drawn, or inclines. One finds in this particular stratum the artist, the journalist, the divorcée and semi-detached woman whose name is legion. The lady who maintains a handsome apartment and entertains lavishly is probably a "kept" woman with an ambiguous past. Occasionally one finds a multiple divorcée with money, playing at patroness to some impecunious song-writer or handsome actor with more brawn than brain. But the "kept" lady predominates. She is ubiquitous. She dresses à la mode, she is an habituée of the smart restaurants, an inveterate first-nighter. Her "particular friend" may be a married man of the "my wife-don't-understand-me" brand, or he may be one of the "get-rich-quick floaters" who joyride across the financial horizon into oblivion. It is to this set the stall-fed woman of the leisure class turns to whet her jaded appetite. And a host-

ess' Sunday AT HOME is highly suggestive of the "obit" of a Town Topics. Individually and collectively they are rotten. Mistaking the sex-heat aroused and stimulated by cocktails and other alcoholic beverages for real love and passion, they wallow in the erotic mire to their heart's content. Nobody criticizes; nobody cares; the faster the pace the greater the joy.

It was upon this subject that my husband and I encountered our first real rift. He had commented rather flippantly on the moral tone of a recent supper party. We fell to discussing the players' status in society. I had observed that with one or two notable exceptions the actor is not received by "our best people." To be sure there are a few cities outside of New York where quite respectable families, bored by the drab routine of conventional society, entertain the actor as a kind of *sauce piquante* to their monotonous lives. But this is the exception and not the rule. Wholly misinterpreting my motive, Will defended his profession with a blind prejudice. After that he did not ask me to accompany him to the various functions. It became quite a common thing for him to telephone me from the Club that he

would not be home until late that night. I was sorry that I had expressed myself so plainly to Will; if only I could make him understand that I wanted him to be true to the best that was in him. . . . It hurt me to hear him speak lightly of the women with whom he associated, and still continue to go among them.

Miss Burton was now a frequent visitor at our home. She adored the boy and never failed to bring him a present when she came. She took upon herself to lecture me for not going out with Will, declaring I was spoiling him, and that I would make him selfish. I thought over what she said, and resolved that I would go with Will when next he asked me. Also I began to formulate a little circle of my own. There was a sculptor to whom I was particularly attracted. He was a Western product, and was preparing to go abroad to study. I had always had a fondness for sculpture, and during my enforced retirement I amused myself at moulding with clay. A baby's hand I had made attracted his attention one day he had called on Will. He advised me to continue my efforts. Miss Burton sent me a wonderful outfit and I took up my work of sculpturing in earnest. My sculptor friend

brought other friends with him, and it became a regular thing for me to receive my friends on Sunday afternoon. I saw that Will enjoyed my little parties, though they were simple and I made no pretensions.

One day—it was at Christmas time—Miss Burton sent me a beautiful gown; with the package came a characteristic note: she begged me to accept the gown and not to feel hurt, that she was dead broke and could not afford to make me a "decent" Christmas present. The gown, she said, had been spoiled by the dressmaker, who had made it much too tight, and it would make her happy if I would accept it with her love. . . .

It was so pretty—all creamy white and fluffy, and there were little pink flowers scattered over the net. I put it on . . . and, as I looked at myself in the mirror, I felt quite pleased with the reflection. White was always becoming to me. . . . I did not tell Will about my present, but the next time he casually mentioned an invitation to dinner I accepted with an alacrity which surprised him.

When Sunday came, I dressed with the excitement of a conspirator, and when Will called me to help him with his tie I walked

into his room with an air of unconcern worthy of a star. Will was delighted with my appearance.

When we entered the house of our hostess I no longer felt the desire to hide myself; instead, I felt quite mistress of myself. It's wonderful what a difference clothes will make in one's feelings. Miss Burton told me once that, whenever she was down on her luck and felt depressed, she forthwith went on a sartorial debauch. She bought everything in sight. Her new clothes re-established her self-respect, and somehow, some way, a good engagement came along and helped her to pay for her prodigality.

We were a little late in arriving, and when I came down from the bedroom, where I had left my wrap, the second round of cocktails was being passed. Will was standing at the foot of the stairs talking with his hostess. A large nude figure carrying softly shaded lights decorated the newel-post, and screened me from view of the woman who was talking to Will.

"You handsome dog!" I heard her say. "What have you been doing to Alice? She's gone clean off her head—threatens to leave her husband, and is drinking like a fish!"

"I haven't done anything," Will began, but at that moment our hostess saw me and nudged Will, who joined me and we entered the drawing-room.

I felt Will's questioning eyes on my face, but I did not look at him; instead, I gave my hand rather impulsively to my sculptor friend who was standing alone, and I did not notice the returning pressure until my wedding ring cut into the flesh, and made me wince. I was wondering who "Alice" could be and what Will had to do with her. Our hostess's "friend" was present. He was a middle-aged man with a ruddy complexion, iron gray hair and a closely cropped moustache. I had once seen him at the Horse Show in one of the boxes, and he had been pointed out to me as a prominent railroad man. He greeted Will noisily.

"Hello, Hartley," he yelled, "you're late on your cue. I suppose you wanted to make an effective entrance!"

At the table I sat next to the sculptor; on my other hand was a dentist who had leaped into fame by having been expelled from a certain European country where he had set up a successful practice. A *liaison* with the wife of a man close to the throne had led to his down-

fall, and he had returned to his native land to be received with open arms by the set in which we were now travelling. He had a face such as I imagined Molière conceived for his Tartuffe; his voice was caressing and made me sleepy. Opposite me sat a well-known star. He was famous for his magnetism. Although I could not discern it, there must have existed something of the sort, for every leading woman who engaged with him, sooner or later, succumbed to his charm. I myself knew of one girl whose life was almost ruined when he took up with another woman who had joined his Company to play a special engagement. This girl was one of the prettiest I ever saw; she was "chaperoned" by a complaisant mother. This irresistible gentleman was married, but his wife refused to live with him and made her home abroad. For the sake of the children she refused to divorce him.

A comic opera singer sat beside the hostess. The dentist, assuming that I knew the situation, asked me, *sotto voce,* how long I thought it would be before "papa took a tumble to himself." When I confessed my inability to follow him, he proceeded to enlighten me. The hostess was infatuated with the singer, who was

as poor as Job's turkey, and while her protector was absent—(he was married and had several grown children)—the lady consoled herself with song. This easy, matter-of-fact way in which these topics were discussed, the utter lack of restraint between the sexes, no longer shocked me. I was on the point of asking my purveyor of illicit news whether he could tell me who Alice was; instead, I turned to the bored man at my right, and by degrees I got him to tell me of his ambitions, his work and his ideas of life. I found we had much in common.

While we were talking, there was a noisy argument going on at the other end of the table.

"I wouldn't stand it for one minute!" rang out the voice of our hostess, and I saw her shoot a meaning glance at the singer.

"Ask an actor's wife! Ask Mrs. Hartley!" bellowed the host. "Mrs. Hartley?"

"Yes?" I responded, not knowing the subject of conversation.

"Pardon me for interrupting so interesting a conversation, won't you, Calhoun," he said, addressing my sculptor friend with exaggerated courtesy. "I'll give her back to you in a min-

ute. . . . Mrs. Hartley, the ladies want to know how it feels to watch your husband make love to another woman?"

I caught Will's eye. At another time I should have been embarrassed. Tonight, however, I felt a strange self-control.

"Oh dear, what an old chestnut!" I answered flippantly. "I believe that's the nine hundred and ninety-ninth time I've answered that question this season." I noticed that my voice took on a bored tone.

"Well, tell us!" urged mine host.

"To tell the truth," I began, "I never give it a thought."

Will's eyes twinkled; he was seated at the far end of the table between two stall-feds.

"It's a part of the business," I continued, "just as dictating to his typewriter is a part of the routine of a business man. Does every wife suspect her husband's stenographer?"

"Yes! yes!" came the chorus from the curvilinear gentlemen at the other end of the table.

I shrugged my shoulders. "Very well, then, it seems to me, since you gentlemen won't behave, that it is up to the women to see that you do!" I sat down. I felt ashamed of my vulgarity.

Our host suggested a toast and scrambled to his feet. "Here's to our wives and sweethearts—may they never meet!"

There was more laughter. The dentist murmured something about moss-grown jokes, and the hostess asked why husbands and lovers were excluded. I felt my mouth drawing down at the corners, and I buried my lips in the American Beauty rose the sculptor had purloined from the centre-piece.

It was probably the frequent replenishing of the wine glasses which led the doctor-dentist to level all his batteries of fascination upon me. He moved nearer and closer, until even the hostess noticed his efforts; she thought it funny. Finally, he slipped his hand beneath the table and let it rest upon my knee. I arose and asked the sculptor to exchange seats with me. I think he understood, for as I passed him he said to me in a low, intense tone, "Is that beast annoying you?" I did not answer. In my confusion I upset a glass of wine, and the wine-agent across the table told me he was sorry I didn't like his wine.

As the dinner progressed some spicy stories were exchanged. The time we lingered at the table seemed interminable. Mr. Calhoun told

me I should take a drink of brandy, for I was growing quite pale. He could not, of course, realize that at that moment I had suddenly noticed that Will's companion was dressed all in black and wore gardenias. A moment later the hostess had called her "Alice." . . . She leered at Will with wine-shot eyes, her breath coming in quick, short gasps, and I noticed that his right and her left hand were under the table. . . .

As we left the table I had asked Mr. Calhoun what time it was. When he told me it was after eleven I ran quickly up the stairs to the room where I had seen a telephone. It was my habit to awaken my boy at half-after nine every night to give him nourishment. He was put to bed at five o'clock, and the period between that and morning was too long to go without food. I wanted to ask my maid whether she had remembered my instructions. The telephone was in a kind of closet off the hostess's bedroom; beyond the bedroom was her boudoir, reached by a door from the corridor. I had finished with my message, and was about to go downstairs, where the singing had begun, when I heard someone enter the boudoir beyond. I stopped and drew back,

why, I do not know. A moment later there were footsteps on the stairs, and Will entered the room. He came quickly and began speaking at once.

"My dear Alice," he said, "this thing can't go on. You are making a fool of me and of yourself. The first thing you know your husband will get on to it and there will be the devil to pay!"

"That's right! Make it harder for me," the woman answered. "Why do you always bring my husband into the conversation? You know how it is between us. We haven't lived as man and wife for years. He's never understood me and I can't go on with him any longer. I won't—that's all!"

There was a pause before Will spoke again.

"Come on, don't go on like that; everybody will know what's happened. You'll spoil your eyes."

Another pause. I think these silences were the hardest to bear. . . .

"You had no right to let it go this far if you didn't care," the woman went on resentfully.

"This far? How do you mean? There has been nothing that you need be ashamed of

—nothing that you couldn't tell your husband if it came right down to it," answered Will.

The woman laughed angrily. "Is that so? I suppose you count a few motor rides and a few suppers on the side nothing. I suppose you wouldn't mind telling your wife that you had held me in your arms and kissed my eyes and my hair. . . ."

"Good Heavens! neither of us meant anything wrong! We were just carried away for a few minutes—you're a fascinating devil—and the wine helped some. . . . Now, don't don't do that, don't do any of that foolish business with me. . . ."

What was she doing, I wondered? Did she intend to kill him or kill herself? I almost started to Will's rescue, then—she laughed.

"Powder your nose and let's go down. Somebody will notice our absence."

Evidently she obeyed, for there was another pause.

"You needn't worry about your wife," she said. "The giant from the West is keeping her busy. Better keep your eye on him."

Will did not reply. My eardrums seemed on the point of bursting from the surging of the blood to my head.

They came out into the corridor. At the head of the steps she stopped.

"I suppose it amuses you to make women love you," she said.

"My dear woman, you don't love me; I don't flatter myself to that extent."

She laughed sneeringly.

Would they never go?

"Kiss me good-night and good-bye," she half whispered.

"This is the last one," he answered, "the last, remember."

There was a stifled cry as she clung to him, and I saw Will release himself and run down the steps. A few minutes later she followed. I found my way down the servants' stairs and entered the dining-room from the butler's pantry. When Will came to look for me I was drinking brandy frappée with the wine merchant. . . . That night I slept on a couch beside my boy's crib.

CHAPTER VI

After that memorable dinner party things were never quite the same between Will and me. I am sure, however, that Will was unconscious of the fact. He went about as usual. At this juncture Boy came down with scarlet-fever. The enforced quarantine acted as a bar to any intimacy between my husband and me. I welcomed the isolation. My feelings had not yet recovered from the bruise I had received. How many times I had re-lived the scene to which I had been an unwilling eavesdropper! I blamed myself for not at once having made my presence known. I excused myself on the ground that to have done so would have placed Will in a ridiculous and embarrassing situation. For some inexplicable reason the idea of embarrassing my husband was repugnant to me. My resentment was concentrated against the woman. I felt sure she was to blame. I invented all kinds of excuses for Will and at the same time I recog-

nized that they were pure inventions. I could not bring myself to kiss my husband—at least, not for a long, long time. His arms no longer connoted a haven. How utterly wretched I was—how lonely and heart-hungry! Only a fierce struggle with my self-respect kept me from throwing myself into my husband's arms and crying out my hurt against his breast.

After Boy had recovered, Will one day remarked that I was looking tired. He said I was stopping indoors too closely—would I not accompany him to a little . . . I tingled all over my body. I dared not trust myself to look at him. Instead I forced a smile and shook my head in negation.

"I reckon you don't like the bunch," he quizzed.

"I fear I'm not even a little bit of a sport," I answered.

He looked at me out of the corner of his eye. The glance was characteristic of Will. Often I had seen this same expression when some one had recognized him on the street or in a restaurant. It was a curious blend of boyish self-consciousness and exaggerated unconcern.

With the coming of summer began the an-

nual hunt for an engagement. A walk along that part of Broadway known as the Rialto during the early months of the heated term leaves the impression that there has been a lock-out of the whole theatrical profession. Actors block the corners and hem the sidewalks. The supply far exceeds the demand. Year after year they make the weary rounds of the agencies. Season follows season with but a few weeks' employment for many of them. One wonders that the impermanency of his profession does not drive the actor to other vocations—perhaps "trades" were the better word, since the rank and file are better adapted to plumbing than to acting. The microbe which infects the actor is as deadly in its effect as the Tsi-tsi fly. It produces an exaggerated ego from which the victim never recovers. The only palliative is the lime-light. Retirement from the stage is never permanent. Farewell tours of prominent players, like the brook, go on forever. It is the spirit of make-believe with which the actor is saturated which leads him to make a front even to his confrères. "Signed for next season?" one overhears, edging one's way through the crowd.

"No, not yet—I've had several good offers,

but not just what I want. I'm in no hurry," and he twirls his cane with a nonchalant air, though he may not have the price of next week's board-bill. And so it goes, ad infinitum. His is the kingdom of bluff.

Will was one of the fortunates. After several weeks of haggling over salary, he was engaged by "America's foremost producer." The actor of established position—"established" being a mere figure of speech, since at best the actor's position is an aleatory one—those of prominence usually demand to read the play before signing a contract. In this instance Will waived this privilege. Absolute secrecy was maintained as to the character of the play. The reason for this lay in the fact that the manager was at war with the Theatrical Syndicate. His grievances he had made known to the public. As a lone, solitary Saint George of *art,* fighting the monster dragon, *commercialism,* he made a "play" for the public's sympathy—and won it.

The momentous question of employment disposed of, we started for our summer holiday. It was Will's first idea to go to a village on Nantucket Island. Here a group of more or less successful actor-folk had established a sum-

mer colony. Some of them owned comfortable bungalows or were in the throes of buying them. After maturer deliberation Will concluded he wanted a change of "atmosphere." In other words he wanted to get away from "shop." A residential park in the Catskills was finally decided upon. The cottagers were for the most part staid Brooklyn families and Will felt in this environment he was reasonably sure of privacy. The delusion was a short-lived one. As we left the train and made our way to the 'bus which was to convey us to the Park I heard a whisper and titter from a bevy of pretty girls who had come to the railway station to watch the new arrivals. "There's Mr. Blank, the actor!" and Will understood that he was "discovered." Some of the girls climbed into the 'bus, others followed on foot. All giggled and made significant remarks. At the Inn it was immediately noised about that an actor was in "our midst." We became the cynosure of all eyes. Curious maiden ladies looked us over—at a respectful distance. Our most insignificant movements were under observation. Now, it is one thing to be stared at on the stage; quite another to have the minutest detail of one's private life under con-

stant surveillance. Will, who had planned to live the simple life, which he had construed for himself as going unshaved for days at a time, wearing baggy trousers and flannel shirts all day and dining in that garb if it so pleased him, now found himself donning white ducks (the salvage of a former season's wardrobe), playing tennis, bridge, or lounging about the piazza answering endless inane questions concerning the stage and its people. If we went for a walk we were soon overtaken; if we planned a quiet day in the woods there was arranged an impromptu picnic-party to accompany us. To be sure the attention thrust upon us was of kindly intent, though Will declared the pleasure was theirs and more or less selfishly bestowed. An actor and his family at close range is a novelty apparently as much coveted as a man at a seaside after the week-end hejira back to town.

One week of the cuisine at the Inn drove Will to dyspepsia tablets. Instead of fresh vegetables, home-grown fowl and the other concomitants of the country-board illusions, we were served with such delicacies as creamed cod-fish, canned salmon and johnny cake. I came to the conclusion that the housekeeping

and servant problems had driven the Brooklynites to a state of submission where even the fare provided by the Inn was better than Bridget's dictation.

The rooms of the caravansary were veritable cockle-shells. The partitions were so thin that we carried on all conversation in subdued whispers. We wished that other guests would emulate our example, alas and alack! Up with the lark and early morning sunbursts were not in Will's curriculum. He said he did not object to a sunrise if he could sit up all night with convivial friends to await it. And, when a man is in the habit of lying abed till noon, it is difficult to change his régime. He soon developed nerves. One morning, after futile attempts to sleep, Will dragged himself into his clothes and disappeared. When finally he returned he had the roguish face of a boy who had been stealing little red apples. He had found a farmhouse and after some "dickering" on both sides he had rented house, farm and all for the remainder of the season.

"Just think, girlie," he enthused, "what a circus it will be! There's a garden with all kinds of vegetables, there's a cow, bushels of

chickens, an old nag, a dog, to say nothing of the pigs and——"

"Who," I gasped, "who is going to care for this menagerie?"

"We are—you and me. Besides I need the exercise. I want to take off a few pounds of this embonpoint or I'll lose my 'figger.' Of course there's a hired man who'll come in to do the milking and the heavy work, and his sister will cook and 'tidy up' for us. It'll be great!" He stopped long enough to throw out his chest, inhale deeply and to exhale noisily while he pounded his lungs—a little trick he had of expressing a sense of well-being. "Fresh vegetables, fresh eggs and the cow—think what the cow will do for the kiddie! You never saw me work, did you?—man with the hoe business, I mean. I used to love that kind of thing when I went home to visit the old folks in the summer. Come along, girlie, let's get things together. The coach and four will be here soon."

He swung Boy over his shoulder and carried him pick-a-back to our room. While we packed he told me the details of his "find." The farm belonged to an old man and his wife, whose children—three sons—had yielded to

the call of the city. Bit by bit the lonely old couple had sold the land, not being able to work it themselves and unsuccessful in their attempts to induce the children to return to their heritage. For a long time they had "hankered" to visit the boys in Brooklyn, but money was scarce and the little farm with the live stock could not be left uncared for. The old man had advertised the homestead for rent, furnished. "The few who came to see had one excuse or another for not wanting it," the old man had told Will. "Most of 'em wanted a bath and runnin' water and they shied at the oil lamps."

"They evidently wanted the simple life with all modern appliances," Will continued. "After talking it over with Ma whilst I waited on the porch drinking buttermilk, Pa returned and asked if I meant business. I assured him I did and proved it by offering to pay the summer's rent in advance."

I caught my breath. Mental arithmetic failed me. Will had told me before leaving New York that we were "playing pretty close to the cushion," and I knew what that meant. If Will noticed my perturbation he evinced no sign, but went on in the same enthusiastic vein.

"Pa and Ma talked it over again, 'If Ma ain't lost her taste for visiting Brooklyn,'—Ma hadn't, but she wanted a week to get ready. Pa said he could pack all he wanted in a paper bag. I said I must have the place at once or not at all—and—here we are." I was not surprised at our sudden change of base. Will always acted on the impulse of the moment.

When Will went down to pay our hotel bill it was lunch-time. Nearly all the cottagers in the Park had assembled. Much regret was expressed at our desertion of the Inn. (I quite understood that "our" was a mere form of courtesy, inasmuch as I was looked upon as only an appendage hitched to a star.) Will laid our desertion to the Boy. "He needs a cow," he explained blandly to a group of admirers. "A child of his age needs one brand of milk. One can't be too careful in hot weather, you know," and Will's whole bearing portrayed paternal solicitude. The farm wagon arrived opportunely. Will winked at me. He had told me that he was "side-stepping" the lunch of dried lima beans and creamed cod-fish. "I wanted to do it gracefully, of course. They are all nice people and it's good business. That's the kind of thing

that gives an actor his following; just the same I'm glad to get away and relax. This being always on parade—! They simply won't concede an actor any privacy. They won't let you be natural. They expect you to act 'on' and 'off.' "

It was a long and bumpy drive to the farm. We could have walked it in a third of the time by cutting 'cross country. The poor old horse driven by Aaih, the farm hand, looked moth-eaten and worn. It hurt my conscience to add to his burden, so Will and I climbed down and walked the rest of the way. Will, carrying Boy first on his shoulder and then on his back, reminded me of pictures I had seen of early settlers making their way through the wilds in search of a home. Once in every little while Will would burst forth in a lusty halloa which made the welkin ring. "Halloa" came back from the echoing hills. Even Boy saluted the great god Pan. There was an exhilaration in the air which made one glad to be alive.

It was a noisy trio which swung into the lane leading to the farm house. Ma was on the front porch awaiting us. She made a quaint picture in her rusty black alpaca with her gingham apron half turned back under her arm. At

her neck there was an old daguerreotype set in a brooch—probably a likeness of a child she had lost. The lack-lustre eyes were kindly, almost pensively so, and the red spots in her cheeks indicated the excitement under which she laboured. While we sprawled on the porch she bustled about for buttermilk. Boy had taken a shine to Aaih, and refused to leave him for the "one brand of milk," the virtues of which Will had expounded to the lady cottagers. Pa called out a friendly greeting from the kitchen where he was "poking up the fire" in response to orders from his wife. The odour of cooking things whetted our already keen appetites. "I had Pa kill a chicken at the last minute," the dear old lady explained, "for everybody who comes to the country hankers for fried chicken." I shot a glance at Will. Will was "a nice feeder" and I devoutly hoped his epicurean tastes would not balk at a freshly-killed fowl. It would be a sin not to appreciate the old lady's kindliness. Mentally I resolved to eat every helping if it killed me.

I fear there was poor picking for Aaih after we left the table. I helped Ma with the dishes and after they were cleared away she

showed me the run of the house. Later we joined the men folks out of doors and made a tour of the farm. There was something pathetic in the way they asked us to take good care of Snyder, whose mixed breed reminded one of the much advertised pickles. Old Ben, we were told, was not fast but he was trustworthy even in the face of automobiles. Good laying hens were pointed out, but I could never remember one from the other. We made the acquaintance of Bossy and were warned that the other cow with a calf was not so friendly. We talked so long that at the last moment Ma got flustered. She came very near forgetting the home-made jelly she was taking to her niece at Kingston where they were to stay the night, going on to New York on the morrow. When at last they drove away to take the train, we followed the buggy to the end of the lane, then watched them out of sight with much waving of hands and repeated good-byes. The sun was dropping behind the peaks. Across the valley spiral coils of smoke showed gray against the blue-green hills. How calm, how serene it was! Neither spoke. Will was leaning against the snake-rail fence, thoughtfully ruminating. Presently he fell to whis-

tling softly. I smiled. "Give my regards to Broadway, remember me to Herald Square" was ludicrously out of joint with our surroundings. Will divined my thoughts and smiled quizzically at me over his shoulder. "It's a long way from Broadway, eh, girlie?"

"Not nearly long enough!" I responded. And I was right. If, upon leaving the Inn we had deluded ourselves with the idea of retiring from the public eye, we soon discovered our mistake. Our retreat was unearthed; our privacy intruded upon. At inopportune moments passers-by would appear ostensibly to inquire their way, obviously to get a glimpse of the actor "at play." It came to be an annoyance, especially after Will was caught in the act of clearing out a duck pond or helping Aaih to whitewash a chicken-house. When Will indulged in manual labour he relieved himself of all superfluous clothing. When a hero does this sort of thing on the stage he manages somehow to look pretty. But a matinée idol with streaks of whitewash laid across his sweating brow, sundry snaggs in disreputable trousers, a handkerchief around his neck with utter disregard of artistic effect, is a treat reserved for the bosom of his immediate family

only. So, after repeated offences, whilom visitors were warned off by the threatening admonition—in more or less uneven lettering—

"PRIVATE PROPERTY—NO ADMITTANCE."

Experience Dorset was Aaih's sister. She might have been his twin, so alike were they. The only apparent difference was that plainness in a man becomes homeliness in a woman. In so far as we were able to discover, Experience belied her name. True, she made delicious bread and crullers, and one never felt her apple dumplings after forty-eight hours, but, other than these, Experience's experience was as drab as her complexion. She was slow of speech—and exhaustive. Her invariable "Now, ma'am, what'll I fly at next?" was contradictory to her deliberation. Nothing ruffled her. In a temperamental family this asset is not to be despised. To Experience Will was an enigma. She confided to me, soon after allying herself with our household, that she was never sure when Will was making believe and when he was himself. She felt certain he must sometimes mix himself up. It was her way of explaining a dual personality.

Will liked to play golf. Several times a

week we tramped across the hills to the Club, some two miles distant. We never left the links without several girls in our train. It was impossible to shake them off. Sometimes they accompanied us to the house and sat on the porch to rest. Later they discovered that afternoon tea was an institution with me. I am sure that Experience enjoyed these little tea-parties as much as did the girls. Punctually at four o'clock she would appear on the porch, neatly dressed. With scissors in hand she raided the flower-beds for lady-slippers and clove-geranium with which to adorn the table. The stone jar in which she kept the cookies was never empty. And when the girls came trooping up the lane she was the first to hear them and to rouse Will from his siesta.

Will said he felt like a bull in a china shop at these informal teas. I thought he was charming and agreeable though he pretended he was bored. After tea we would wander out of doors. Nearly all the girls took snap-shots of Will. He tried to find a new pose for each of them. "The man with the hoe" showed Will among the cabbages, resting on the handle of the hoe. "Under the old apple tree" was effective even if the apple tree was an oak.

Reclining on a mound of hay, carted for the purpose by the faithful Aaih, was labelled "In the good old summer time." "The actor at play" showed Will with a golf-stick in his hand. Later Will autographed the pictures.

Many were the questions we were called upon to answer concerning the stage as a career. We were asked to verify all sorts of silly gossip about players. It was well-nigh impossible to convince them that all male stars were not in love with their leading ladies and vice versa. It goes without saying that I should not escape the inevitable question, "How did I feel when I saw my husband making love to another woman?" It amused me to watch the little subterfuges to which the girls resorted to win my favour. Bon-bons were the bribes most in vogue. One day I overheard a newcomer to our circle tell another girl, "You didn't tell me he was married —and a baby, too. How terribly unromantic! I'll never go to see him act again as long as I live."

Will and I laughed over the situation, albeit there is a considerable ground for the managerial contention that actors and actresses should not marry, or, if married, the fact

should be suppressed rather than advertised. Indeed, who likes to think of her Romeo as dawdling a colicky baby during the wee sma' hours about the time he should be exclaiming with unfettered fervour, "What light from yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun!" I recall a tragedy of my own romantic youth upon discovering that a favourite actor was not only a father, but that he wore—O, horrible, most horrible—a toupee!

There was no escaping the amateur theatricals. I predicted it early in the summer. The proceeds of the entertainment were to be applied toward the discharging of the debt of the Golf Club. Will was asked to take entire charge of the programme. His position was no sinecure.

It was their first intention to give "As You Like It" in the open, but as every young woman thought herself particularly adapted to the requirements of Rosalind, Will found himself in a delicate position. The young men of the community themselves cut the Gordian knot. They aspired to be comedians. Vaudeville was finally decided upon. A quartette of college students blacked up and gave a min-

strel show. Some of the jokes were local and aimed at the idiosyncrasies of the cottagers. Others were purloined from Jo Miller's joke-book. There was a trombone solo by the village farrier, several vocal duets and a selection from the Mikado. Will contributed several monologues. But the star feature of the evening was the performance of Dolly in a scene from the Wizard of Oz. She was a dainty creature with Dresden china beauty and bovine eyes and had been much admired by the male contingent of the colony. Everybody felt sure there was a treat in store for them. There was. When Dolly entered, leading the amiable Bossy, a gasp reverberated through the erstwhile bowling alley. Dolly's short skirt revealed nether extremities which would have done great credit to Barnum's fat lady or a baby grand piano!

Our vacation passed all too quickly. The day approached when we needs must bid goodbye to our retreat. . . . The memory of the old farm-house lingers still. The chill in the air at nightfall; the warmth of the log-fire; the sense of comfort and content; the green pasteboard shade on the lamp; the rag rug on the floor. In my mind's eye I see the old couple

sitting here of winter nights; Ma, piecing together the vari-coloured rags for the summer weaving; Pa, nodding over last week's news; Snyder stretched out in front of the fire, whimpering in his dreams. How far removed from the feverish walk of our life, with its hopes, its struggles, its heart-burns, and its empty fame! Yet, they, as we, were "merely players."

CHAPTER VII

REHEARSALS for the new play began in August. The days were wilting but the theatrical world up and doing. Every available stage, hall and loft was requisitioned. Several companies shared the same stage, dividing the hours between them. Will's manager had his own theatre and the rehearsals were all-day affairs. Will studied his part at night after "the family" had retired. Sometimes I would lie awake and listen to him, talking aloud, reading a line first with one inflection and then trying another. Will's voice was one of his greatest assets.

Experience had come back to town with us. Before leaving the mountains, Will had jestingly asked her whether she would like to see Broadway. She took him at his word. We flattered ourselves she had become fond of us. We discovered later that it was the profession, not the family, which lured her. She had found a new volume of faery lore. Will was

the faery prince. Sometimes I wondered just how Experience reconciled Will's morning grumpiness with her preconceived notion of a hero. I recall how after seeing Will in a new rôle he had asked her how she liked him. She expressed herself as pleased with the play in general and with him in particular. But after he left the room she confided to me the following: "Ain't he the naturalest thing when he yells at that man with the powdered hair, Jackwees or somethin' like that—'Jackwees, bring me my sword!' I declare, ma'am, I jumped a foot and started for that sword! It was so natural; that's just the way he yells when I forget the morning papers."

The reliability of Experience brought me more leisure. I was free to go about without worry over the boy. I felt that intellectually I needed stimulus and I planned a winter's work. Of course everything depended upon the play "getting over," to use the vernacular. Will said he did not see how it could fail. Everyone connected with the production said the same thing. Success was in the air. Several times I had dropped in to see a rehearsal. I was interested to know the "method" of this particular manager about whom so much had

been written. His productions were always effectively mounted. Magazine articles, full-page interviews had from time to time printed his recipes for evolving successful stars as well as money-making plays. One thrilling account in particular—supposedly his own words—told of the strenuous training of the tyro; how he aroused in his actors the precise degree of emotion necessary to a given scene. "I dragged her by the hair!" or "I pictured her own mother lying dead, foully murdered, before her until she cried aloud at the picture I had conjured." Again, "I tied my wrists together, I rolled about the floor, struggling to free myself; I wanted to feel just what a man would feel under similar conditions!" These and other highly coloured statements had from time to time been served up to the public. It is amazing how gullibly the public bites at the press-agent's worm. In nearly all such instances nothing could be farther from the truth. My own observation convinced me that the man's genius lay in his ability to select the right person for the right place. Having made the selection he played upon the *amour propre* of his puppets. He led them to believe he had supreme confidence in their abil-

ity. The ruse was successful. It is the better part of human nature to want to measure up to the good opinion of others.

His methods of conducting a rehearsal were the simplest. He had infinite patience and perseverance. He left nothing to chance. A scene or an effect was repeated until the "mechanics" became automatic. His voice never rose above a conversational tone. He knew that to command others he must first be in command of himself. He left the roaring to petty understrappers with inflated ideas of their own importance. Once in a blue moon he let go. The effect was electrifying. I strongly suspected, however, that there was more or less "acting" in these outbursts. Just as his reluctant appearance before the curtain on first nights was a "carefully prepared bit of impromptu acting." The frightened expression of his face; the quick, nervous walk; the almost inaudible voice when he thanked his audience, "on behalf of the star, the author (or co-author), the musicians, the costumers, the scenic artists" and so on down the line; this with his mannerism of tugging at a picturesque forelock, this alone was worth the price of admission. First and last he was a good show-

man. The star who was the stepping stone to his fame and fortune was a lady with a past. She had entered the stage door through the advertising medium of the divorce court. After several unsuccessful attempts at starring she placed herself under the tuition of the manager, then allied with a school of acting. Possessed of abundant animal vitality—"magnetism," if you prefer—as well as "temperament," the ugly duckling developed into a star of first magnitude. When Will joined the company she was at the height of her success—a success which later dulled the finer artistic restraint and listed toward a fall. But act she could, playing upon each reed, each stop of the emotional organ, with a conviction of which few actresses are capable. In the choice of plays the genius of the man again displayed itself; the right play for the right person. Doubtless, he understood that temperament, after all, is but the flood-tide of our natural predilections.

To the layman a rehearsal is a bewildering and murky affair. Seated in the "front of the house," in the clammy shadow of shrouded seats, a student of human nature finds much to interest him. Under the light of a single "bunch" or the "blanching" irregular foots, the

players look old and insignificant. The blue white light has a cruel way of exposing the lines and seams. They sit about or stand in groups, the blue-covered typewritten parts in hand awaiting the call of the first act. A youngish man, probably the assistant stage-manager, sets the stage; that is, he marks the entrances and the boundaries with plain wooden chairs and stage-braces. The homely wooden chair plays many parts; now it stands for a fire-place or a grand piano, again it may be a rocky pass beyond which are the mountains.

A fagged looking man enters the stage door with a hurried, important air. By the bundle of manuscript under his arm shall you know him. It is the stage-manager. He greets the members of the company with a curt, preoccupied air and hurries down to the prompt stand. There are consultations with the working staff and perhaps with one or two of the players. While he is thus engaged let us enquire into the personnel of the company; that tall good-looker in the well tailored gown is a newcomer to the stage. She has been given a small part —a half dozen lines at best. On twenty dollars a week she carries a maid—and a jewel

case. No, she does not *have* to work for a living; neither is she the spoilt child of a multi-millionaire. She belongs to that great class of women who have no class. Time hangs heavily on her hands. It looks better to be connected with some kind of a profession; a legitimate profession. Besides, her vanity makes her "want to do something." The stage has always appealed to her. With a little "influence" she gets a part. Salary is no object. Perhaps the management has saved five or ten dollars a week on the deal. At any rate a good-looker adds "class" to the personnel. She drives to the theatre in a taxi; sometimes she comes in a big limousine car accompanied by an elderly gentleman with watery eyes. On the opening night he will send her great boxes of American Beauty roses. After the show they will sup at Rector's, and his friends who have been in front with him will tell her how pretty she looked. Of course she will not go on the road with the company. Dear no! She will leave that to some other girl who is not so young, not so pretty, but who needs the money.

The white-haired lady with the sweet face and the stern old man who has brought her a

chair are man and wife. Theirs is one of the few stage marriages which have endured. Perhaps it is the very rarity of the case which makes them so popular and well-beloved. One hears them invariably referred to as "Dear old Mr. and Mrs. So and So." One looks at them wistfully and wonders at the secret of their success. . . .

The actor with the monocle, oddly cut clothes and the overpowering savoir-faire is an English importation. Managers assert that the average English actor plays the gentleman more effectively than his American cousin. It all depends on what kind of a gentleman the rôle demands. When an Englishman is called upon to portray a gentlemanly officer of the United States Army the effect is incongruous to say the least. The American manager, vulgar and uncouth himself, is impressed by the English complacency. A bluffer, he has a sneaking respect for anyone who throws a bluff and gets away with it.

The several youngish men with a hint of effeminancy in their make-up might be called the "stationaries" or "walking gentlemen." One of this *genre* is to be found in nearly every company. Too proud for the ribbon counter,

too erratic for commercial life, he drifts into the profession because he feels the call of the artistic temperament. He plays small parts, disseminates gossip, flatters the star—or the leading lady—reads a little, sleeps much—and drinks more.

That beefy looking man is the leading heavy. Not many years since he was a leading man. Now when a leading man takes on flesh he is marked for a reduction in value. The first step down in his career is the day he begins to play heavies. To be sure, there are heavy men who never have been leading men; these, however, come under the head of character heavies. The gentlemanly heavy unfailingly aspires to heroic rôles. The present incumbent of villainy had "fallen on his feet." Some seasons previously he had played an inconsequential engagement under the same management. The star took a fancy to him. Henceforth his engagements were assured—until the fancy waned. Everybody understood; they shrugged their shoulders and smiled. Nobody cared. Neither did the heavy man.

Character actors without exception are envious of the leading man. "Call that acting?" demands the man behind the make-up. "Call

it acting to walk on and play yourself? Why, it's a cinch!"

"*O, is it?*" retorts the leading man. "You ought to try it. It's the most difficult thing in the world to walk on and be perfectly natural. I'd like to see some of you fellows who hide behind your wigs and queer make-ups go on and play a straight part. Why you wouldn't know what to do with your hands!" . . .

There was something plaintive about the woman who sat in the shadow of the set-pieces, piled high against the wall. The rouge on her cheeks but accentuated the lines in her face. The brassy gold on her hair showed gray against her temples. "Better days" was clearly stamped all over her. Perhaps she was thinking of those days—when *she* was a star; when being a star meant something more than an animated clothes-horse. Her mother had been a great actress in the Booth and Barrett days. She, herself, had lisped some childish lines with them. Later, she had become a soubrette and a star in merry little plays in which she sang and danced and "emoted," all in one evening. There are no soubrettes nowadays. The term has degenerated into a slangy sobriquet. "Ingénue" has replaced it; nothing is required of

an *ingénue* but saccharine sweetness and vacuous prettiness—and youth, youth, *youth!* O, the harvest of age! The public which she had amused for years has forgotten her. They scarcely recall her existence: not even a hand of recognition on her entrance. Occasionally a reviewer will dig her out of the dust of the past—only to speak of her as "in Memoriam." Managers, too, hesitate to engage her. There are so many has-beens and so few parts to fit them. Besides, there are freshly spawned pupils from the divine academies to be had for the asking. Why waste money? . . .

A psychical ripple disturbs the ether. Necks crane toward the door. The star arrives. She comes slowly, with the air of one assured of an effective entrance. She punctuates her animated conversation with the manager with smiles and nods. That meek-looking person bringing up the rear is the author. He gropes his way through the dark passage to the front of the house and is lost in oblivion.

"First act!" calls the prompter. "*First act!*"

* * * *

The play opened out of town. The working force was sent ahead with the scenery and

the baggage. There was a special train for the company. Besides the regular staff there were costumers, flash-light photographers, relatives of the players and guests of the management. The guests included several critics from certain New York journals. One of these had an ambitious wife who was a member of the company. The other, rumour had it, was on the salary list of the management. This may or may not have been true. Subsequent effusive reviews and the manner in which these critics took up the cudgels against the enemies of the manager did not, however, indicate unbiased opinion. "Subsidized or hypnotized"—that was the question. The persuasive art of "fixing" is not confined to politics.

When the train arrived in ————, there was barely time for a hasty bite before rushing off to the theatre. One felt the thrill of excitement at the very stage door. Even the back doorkeeper was infected. When Will stopped to look through the pigeon-holes for mail, the keeper of the sacred portal was exhibiting a brand new litter of kittens. "Everyone of 'em black; just like their mother. Your show'll be a big success—talk about your mascots!" Stagefolk are as superstitious as a nigger mammy.

A whole chapter might be devoted to their lore. One of the greatest hoodoos is to speak the tag of a play before the opening night. The tag of a play is the last several words immediately preceding the final fall of the curtain. When it comes to the tag, the actor to whose lot the final lines fall either stops with a gesture or perhaps he purloins Hamlet's last words—"The rest is silence."

Back on the stage there was the sound of hammers, the shouts of the stage-hands to the men in the flies, "drops" being adjusted, calls of warning to some reckless person about to come in contact with a sandbag at that moment lowered from the flies. Abrupt blasts of the orchestra reach one's ears. The music cues are being rehearsed, the director shouting against the din on the stage. On the "apron," with a bottle of milk in his hand and surrounded by a half dozen coatless and perspiring men, is the producer. A shaft of light darts from the spot-light machine in the gallery, and hovers over the stage like a search-light at sea. Green, yellow, red and blue slides are tried and a weird waving moving picture effect brings a shout of laughter from the privileged watchers in front. In the dressing-

rooms the players are making up. The wardrobe mistress hurries from one to another, needle and thread in hand. There are impatient calls for the head costumer; "Props" taps at the doors and delivers the properties to be carried by the various actors in the play. The actors talk across the partitions or run through lines of a "shaky" scene. "Fifteen minutes—fifteen minutes!" warns the assistant stage manager making the rounds. Below stage, the supers or "extra people" sit about in noisy groups awaiting the call. Some of them are as "nervous as a cat," to use their own expression. These are not the rank and file of supernumeraries. The promise of a long run in New York ofttimes tempts women who have "spoken lines" to go on as extra ladies. As a sop they are given a leading part to understudy. The excitement is infectious. With the lowering of the curtain and the first strains of the orchestra one instinctively shifts forward to the edge of one's seat.

It is either the lights or a missing prop or a hiatus between speech and action which the first acquaintance with the scenery develops or a "jumbled" ensemble or something unexpected which brings the rehearsal to an abrupt halt.

The dialogue stops like a megaphone suddenly shut off. The director hurries down the centre aisle, the prompter's head appears at the proscenium arch. "Loved I not honour more!" repeats the actor, looking expectantly off stage. "Loved I not honour more!" bellows the stage-manager, getting into the game. "That's *your* cue, Mr. Prime Minister. Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones! Where *is* Mr. Jones?"

"Jones! Jones!" reverberates about the stage and in the flies.

"Here I am! I hear you!" answers a muffled voice up-stage. "I can't get through. The entrance's blocked with a sacred elephant!" There is a rush of stage hands in the direction indicated. Simultaneously Mr. Jones appears L. 1. E. "I'm sorry," he says, "but I couldn't butt in through the stone walls of the castle, now could I?" indicating the boxed set which formed the outer walls of the scene.

The obstruction is removed amidst a heated confab and the stage cleared for action. "Go back—go back to Miss Melon's entrance." Miss Melon enters. The scene starts flatly enough. It is difficult to pick up a scene and get back into the atmosphere at once. One must "warm up to it."

A star requires an effective entrance. The audience must be apprised of her approach. "Here she comes now!" (accompanied by a look off stage.) Or, a flunkey enters and solemnly announces, "His Highness, Prince of Ptomania, mounts the steps." These helpful hints prepare the reception which the ushers start at the psychological moment. Many persons are backward about applauding for fear of making a mistake: just follow the usher. The supporting actors understand that they are expected to "humour" the applause, either upon an entrance or for a scene. Stars, however, do not always encourage applause for their supporting actors. Some of them go so far as to "shut it off" by flashing on house light on a curtain in which they do not figure, or dimming the foots or directing the actors to "jump in" with the next speech.

In the midst of a scene which sends little shivers up and down one's spinal column the star hesitates, stammers, repeats, then interpolates while she searches frantically among the papers on the table for the missing prop. "Where's the knife—the fatal dagger?" she demands, dropping the rôle as one would step out of a petticoat. The man about to be killed

joins in the hunt for the deadly weapon. "I can't kill you very well without a knife, can I, Jack? Unless I stab you with a hatpin—" There is something so incongruous in the rapid contrasts that everyone, including the star herself, gives way to laughter. Meanwhile the stage-manager's yells for Props have brought that culprit from the flies where he has been touching up a damp cloud with a paint brush.

"The knife!" a chorus hurls at him.

"What knife?" he demands, continuing to mix the silver lining to the cloud.

"The dagger! I told you the last thing not to forget it!" fumes the bumptious stage-manager.

"Aw, what's the matter with you?" replies Props witheringly. Then he ambles down to the star, who by this time is lost in a little side-play with her heavy man. "Miss Blank," he begins with punctuation marks between each word, "Miss Blank, didn't you tell me to leave that knife on your dressing table so you could place it where you wanted it on the table centre?"

"I did, I did! I apologize, Johnny—I beg everybody's pardon!" She makes a contrite bow toward the front of the house. Johnny

shuffles off, muttering to himself, and Madame's maid enters with the missing link. "Let's begin at your cross," Madame says to the heavy. "Just before you say, 'Darling, my life, my love, you're mine at last!' And Jack—I hope your wooden chest protector is in place, for I'm going to strike to-night just as I am going to do to-morrow night and turn it r-r-round and r-r-round, as if I loved your blood—and Mr. Director," she glides to the foots and shades her eyes from the glare, "Herr Director, can't you play a little more *piano* just at that point? I want my gurgle of delight to get *over*—understand? . . . O, Mr. Hartley, while I think of it——"

She toys with the ornaments on his dress as she speaks. "In our next scene give me a little more room; play farther down stage. It's better for our scene." Mr. Hartley smiles to himself as he disappears in the wings; he is "on-to" the little tricks of stars and leading ladies. To make a *vis-à-vis* play the scene down stage is to rob him of any effective participation in the scene. "To hog" is the vulgar but expressive infinitive applied to this trick of the trade.

After many false starts, the end of the act is finally reached. The players are then posed in

certain effective scenes from the play and the flash-light pictures are taken. Then comes a change of costume and the second act is set. During the long wait members of the company come in front to get a glimpse of the scenery or to discuss the play and the performance with their friends. I recall an instance which will exemplify the jealousy of one star for another, especially those under the same management. During the early years of Will's career he had played with a summer stock company. The leading woman of the organization was now one of the stars under Will's present management. She had come on from her country home—(her own season had not yet opened) —and was an interested spectator of the dress rehearsal. She and Will had kept up a desultory interest during the intervening years and were on a friendly footing. "What do you think of the play?" he asked, sitting down beside her.

"It's a sensation," she predicted. "How does your part pan out?"

"O, it's a fair part. I've got a couple of big scenes, but the *heavy* makes circles all around him. If I had read the play before I signed, I believe I should have turned it down."

"What do you care—you're the *hero,* and that is what counts with the women. It fits you like a glove; and, speaking of parts, what do you think of *that* for a star-part? Did you ever see anything like it? She's the whole show. . . . When I think of the *also-ran* I am playing for a star part . . . let me tell you—just between ourselves—that he'll have to hand me out something fatter next season or there'll be something doing in another direction. Little Abe's syndicate has been making eyes at me and—you never can tell. Glory! I never saw such an acting part in my life! Why, she isn't off the stage two minutes during the whole first act!"

* * * *

It is past midnight when the curtain goes down on the second act. The lights have worked badly and for an hour the electricians have been put through the paces until the desired effect is reached. Spirits begin to flag. The Englishman's wife sets up a tea basket; friends and relatives are sent out for sandwiches and "something to wash 'em down." At this stage of the siege one becomes a mere machine. There is no attempt at acting. It is now a mechanical perfection. When the scenic

effects refuse to act on cues or "anticipate" the same, or the supers jumble and everybody grows cross and "on edge," one shudders to realize that the opening night is close at hand. One hopes and prays things will not go like this tomorrow night. There is consolation in the old adage: "A poor dress rehearsal—a good first night."

We leave the theatre when the milkman is making his rounds. A day of fitful sleep with its undercurrent of tension; the opening night with nerves tuned to the highest pitch, then success or failure, who can tell? The box office is the arbiter.

The opening night is not the only strain attendant upon a new production. One is on tenter-hooks for days, perhaps weeks, to learn whether the play has "caught on" or not. Favourable, even laudatory, reviews will not drag the public into the theatre if they do not like the offering. Stars may have a certain drawing power, but "The play's the thing." No star ever yet saved a bad play from oblivion or spoiled a good play with bad acting.

I am sure that Will and the members of the company watched the "houses" from the peepholes in the curtain as eagerly as the star and

the management kept an eye on the box-office receipts. "How was the house last night?" was the daily question I put to Will with his morning coffee. Finally we settled back with the assurance of a season's run ahead of us. I set in motion the plans I had outlined for myself. I induced Will to study languages with me for a time, but his hours were so uncertain that he finally dropped out. Music was a passion with me. I went through a whole season of the Opera treat I had promised myself for years. Will was fond of music, too, and sometimes we would go together to the Sunday night concerts at the Metropolitan. Of course there were still the dinner-parties and the supper-parties and matinées for benevolent purposes. Will seemed to have tired of the parties and spent more and more of his time at the Lambs. He never came home to supper after the theatre nowadays. I missed my little talks with him across the supper table. There was no longer any need to throw cold water in my face to keep myself fresh until his coming. Sometimes when I was wakeful I would hear him come in; it was generally daylight. Sometimes, on Sunday morning, if he found me awake he would hand me the Morning Tele-

gram. No wonder they call it "the chorus girl's breakfast." Among other things I did not like about the Lambs was that irritating way the telephone boy had of asking "Who's calling, please." Will said they do that at all Clubs.

CHAPTER VIII

By this time I had my own little *coterie* and I prided myself it was a cosmopolitan gathering which graced our little apartment on the second and third Sundays of the month. There was so much to learn, the interests were so diversified that I eagerly welcomed members of other professions than our own—if they were worth while. Our sculptor friend brought men who had travelled in remote parts of the world; they in turn brought others. We numbered several army and navy officers, a German scientist, men and women journalists, a cartoonist and an artist, women engaged in Settlement work and the quaint old French professor who taught me the language. When we could overcome his diffidence he was a mine of information. He had witnessed the Commune of Paris and was working on a book on that subject.

It is an interesting study to divide the *pastiche* from the real. The time-killers and the curious soon dropped out. It was not difficult to limit our *coterie* to the dimensions of our

home. I could not but contrast my simple "at homes" with those of the Dingleys. We had received several cards for their Sundays and Will said we must go to at least one of them. The Dingleys had sprung from humble beginnings. They were jocosely referred to as the "ten, twent' and thirt's."

When I was a little girl in short skirts they were members of a répertoire company which played our town during County Fair week. The répertoire comprised such good old timers as The Two Orphans, the Danites, East Lynne, the Silver King, Streets of New York, Camille and The Ticket-of-Leave Man. Mrs. Dingley was the leading lady and her husband the utility man. She was my ideal of a heroine—in those days. Her hair was very golden, and as the weepy heroine she wore a black velvet dress with a long train. That black velvet (later experience told me it was velveteen) played many parts. It was a princess, and for evening wear the guimpe had only to be removed. Or, when the heroine was ailing, as becomes a persecuted woman, the princess, with the help of a full front panel, was converted into a tea-gown. Again, it was used as a riding habit, draped up on one side and topped by husband's silk hat

wound round with a veil. With a good deal of crêpe drapery from the bonnet, the same gown passed muster as widow's weeds. Mentally, I resolved that when I became an actress I should have just such a prestidigital gown in my wardrobe.

By dint of hard work on Mrs. Dingley's part and unmitigated nerve on the part of her husband they had finally arrived on Broadway. They had recently acquired a large house in the older part of the city and I understood it was Mrs. Dingley's idea to establish a *salon.* Certainly she was successful in drawing a crowd. The house was strikingly furnished. There was much gold furniture and antique bric-à-brac; canopied beds and monogrammed counterpanes. After a personally conducted tour of the house and an enlightening dissertation upon the real worth of and prices paid for the fittings, one retained a confusing sense of having had an exercise in mental arithmetic.

It seemed rather catty of the women to make fun of the Dingleys behind their back and at the same time accept their hospitality. Two smart looking women whom I recognized as members of Mrs. D's. company appeared to get no little amusement out of the coat of arms

on Mrs. Dingley's bed. "Why didn't they purloin a beer-stein, quiescent on a japanned tray?" I heard one say.

"Or a Holstein bull rampant on a field of cotton," the other giggled.

I failed to grasp the significance of their remarks, though I saw the humour in their allusion to the empty book-shelves which lined the walls of the library. "Why not buy several hundred feet of red-backed books, like a certain politician who wanted to fill up the wall space in his library?"

"Pshaw! It would be cheaper to use props," scoffed the other.

I myself thought a dictionary and a few grammars a sensible beginning, as Mrs. Dingley was a veritable Mrs. Malaprop. Later I committed a *faux pas,* though I meant no offense. In my effort to say something nice to my hostess I remarked that I had seen her years ago during the early days of her struggle and that I had been one of her ardent admirers. The way she said, "Yes?" with the frosty inflection made me understand she did not care to remember her beginnings.

While we were drinking tea out of priceless cups—the history of which was being retailed

by our host—there was a commotion and a craning of necks toward the stairs. The hostess hurried forward to greet the late arrival. There was considerable nudging and innuendo exchanged as a small pleasant-faced man with a Van Dyke beard entered the room. Our host greeted him jovially, almost boisterously. "Here comes the king—here comes the king!" hummed the two actresses, winking significantly at me. There was a buzz of voices while Mrs. Dingley paraded the lion of the occasion about the room with an air of playful proprietorship. The little man had a penchant for pretty girls and flattery. He got both. Everybody fawned on him, Mr. Dingley laboured heroically to be witty. My curiosity finally drove me to ask my neighbours who the little man was.

"Is he a manager, or a producer, or?—?" I whispered.

There was a peal of laughter before I was answered.

"O, he's a producer, all right! Why, don't you know who he is? He's the goose that laid the golden egg!" taking in the gold furniture with a comprehensive sweep of her hand. She lowered her voice and leaned toward me. "He's

Mr. ————!" I recognized the name of the multimillionaire. "Is he?" I queried, trying to get another look at him.

The women relapsed into their confidences. "How do you suppose she explains it to ——?" calling Mr. Dingley by his first name. The other woman shrugged her shoulders. "She doesn't have to explain; money talks."

On the way home I asked Will what they meant.

He smiled and shrugged his shoulders. "They do say that the little man is an 'angel.' "

"Well, suppose he is?" I began indignantly. "There is such a thing as clean-minded men of the world: patrons of art without ulterior motives. All art needs fostering, and who better able to help the climbers than ——?"

Will laid his hand on mine, a little way he had when he wanted to reassure me.

"I haven't a doubt in the world that there are clean-minded men of means without 'ulterior motives,' as you express it. I also believe that hen's teeth are rare."

* * * *

There were other near-salons to which we were invited. Some of them were highly temperamental gatherings. Every large city has

its artistic set, but New York may safely claim the medal for the half-baked neurotics who wallow in illicit cults which they sanctify in the name of art. One of the most typical and, by the same token, the most amusing of these esotoric feasts was presided over by a lady-like creature who had spent some time in the Far East. We were met at the outer portal by a jet black, down-South negro done up in full Eastern regalia. An air of mysticism permeated even the box couches against the wall. They had a peculiar "feel" to them and one sank into their enfolding depths as one is taught to sink into the arms of Nirvana. It must have been awful for short, fat persons to scramble to their feet, after once being beguiled into sitting on these couches. The mysticism was enhanced by burning incense, shaded lights, draperies, and the host himself, who received us in Eastern garb, resplendent with the famous jewels, a gift from some potentate or other. We were conducted to a dais where the guest of honour —an oily, complacent Swami—received us. If we were pretty, the Swami held our hands longer than the amenities of good society demand. Some of the guests were highly sensitized beings. Some were lean like Cassius;

perhaps they "thought too much." There was a preponderance of Greek and other classic dresses, over un-classic figures. (Why *will* doctors condemn the corset?) Hair-dressing was simplicity itself; in fact, the simplicity suggested a lick and a promise. Sometimes there were beads woven in the scrambled mess.

The sockless damsel was in evidence and nobility was represented by a certain antique Baroness with a penchant for baby blonde hair. Affinity hunters abounded. By the dreamy longing of their watery eyes shall ye know them. Some there were who had made several excursions into the realms of free and easy love, but all, *all* had returned empty-handed, unsatisfied. O cruel Fate! And so they go, hunting, hunting. . . .

After a call to silence, the Swami with the ingratiating smile and good front teeth made an address. It was a mystical, tortuous, rambling discourse which sounded to me a good deal like an advocation of free love. He told what ailed us; he said we didn't love enough. He assured us it was O, so easy to get our slice of the wonderful, all-pervading ether with which we were saturated. We simply didn't know how to use it. He had come to teach us:

his the mission to prescribe for us. Electricity had been harnessed, why not love? I shuddered when I thought of the possibilities of a love-trust. Of course it would be cornered by some of the millionaires.

After the address everybody clustered around the dispenser of Oriental pearls. The Swami slipped little printed matters into the palms of the neophytes. They told how farther enlightenment could be attained, on given days at given hours and given prices.

Later our brute element was fortified by wafers and a mysterious punch. I felt sorry for the late-comers who missed the intellectual feed and arrived just in time for the refreshments. Wafers are not very sustaining. The punch was a mysterious and subtle concoction with a tendency to promulgate the tenets of the Swami's new religion. Before we took our leave I thought the eyes of the new disciples had grown more languishing and were considerably lit up. It may have been, of course, that the Swami had taken the lid off a few vats of his cerulean ether which was too highly rarefied for those present. As we closed the door and stepped out into the winter night, we instinctively inhaled the cold air, which, though

it may not be full of love, is full of common-sense ozone.

"When Boston people want to be naughty they go to New York." Our hostess nodded sententiously across the table as she made the statement.

"Why confine it to Boston? Why not Philadelphia, Washington or——?"

"Because I don't know anything about those cities, and I do know my home city," interrupted his wife.

"I guess you're right," Mr. Mollett answered. "It's the same spirit which keeps alive Le Rat Mort, or Maxim's, or any of those resorts in Paris. You rarely meet a Parisian at these show-places. If it were not for the foreigners—principally Americans and English—they'd have to shut up shop."

"That's precisely my contention. One does things in Paris or New York one would never think of in Boston."

Will had met Mr. Mollett at a Lambs' Gambol one Sunday night during the recent season in New York. They had taken a shine to each other, to use Mr. Mollett's expression, and had exchanged cards. "I liked your husband from the start," Mr. Mollett once said to

me. "He's not a bit like an actor; he's natural and not a bit of a *poseur.*" It appears that when anyone wants to pay an actor a particularly high compliment he tells him he is not a bit like an actor! This is not flattering to the rank and file of players, who labour under the misapprehension that to be effective they must act on and off the stage.

On the opening night of the following season in Boston Will was pleased to find a card from Mr. Mollett and a note from his wife, asking whether I was in town; if so, would I waive the formality of a cali and join them at "beans" on Saturday night after the performance.

Mrs. Mollett's Saturday suppers were as much of an institution as the beans themselves. Our hostess was a bright, intelligent little woman without the pretense of the intellectual. Externally, she had all the ear-marks of a Boston woman. She wore the practical but disfiguring goloshes of a Boston winter and she carried a reticule. Her dress might have been made in Paris, but it had a true New England hang to it. It wasn't a component part of her; it was *a thing apart.* Her skin was rough and fretted with pin-wrinkles. I never

saw a jar of cold cream on her dressing-table.

The Molletts enjoyed a comfortable income which they appeared to use judiciously. Their home was comfortable and in good taste. Their library was a treat; not merely fine bindings and rare editions. The volumes showed an intimate acquaintance with the owner. By the process of elimination they had formed a selected chain of the better class of actors, who found a warm welcome awaiting them whenever they played Boston. The Molletts' leaning toward the artistic had no taint of the free-and-easy predilection. The element of illusion furnished by their player friends was precisely the variety needed to counteract the monotony of their daily routine. Both sides benefited by the exchange.

Boston was the first stand on tour. The second season had opened with a six weeks' engagement in New York and one, two or more weeks were booked in the larger cities. The original company was advertised and—rare integrity—maintained. Will decided that it was cheaper to carry the boy and me on the road than to keep up two establishments. Luckily we sublet our apartment. I was for send-

ing Experience back to her home, though I had become sincerely attached to her and so had Boy. Will declared we could not manage without a nurse. I assured him we could. "You don't suppose you can carry that Buster around in your arms, do you? And wouldn't I look nice climbing on and off trains, and coming into hotels with a baby in my arms? Pretty picture for a matinée idol! No, ma'am, Experience remains. Besides," he smiled at me, "a nurse and a valet help to make a good front. It'll keep the management guessing."

Unfortunately the management were not the only ones kept guessing. Good hotels were expensive and Will's position did not permit him to stop at any other kind. It worried me a great deal to see Will's envelope come in on Tuesday and scarcely anything left on Wednesday when we had paid the bills. I suspected, too, that Will had some debts hanging over from last season. I knew he had drawn on the management during the summer. We foolishly took a cottage at Allenhurst on the sea, where we spent our holidays. The week-end parties proved expensive. It was easily accessible to New York and I never knew how popular Will was with the profes-

sion until that summer. I regretted we had not gone back to the farm in the Catskills.

I saw a great deal more of Will on the road than I had in New York. There was no Lambs' Club and, though Will had guest-cards to clubs in various cities, there was not the lure of intimate association. We took long walks together, browsed in the book-shops, visited public buildings such as the library in Boston, and sometimes lunched or "tead" with friends. Will did not care to accept invitations to dinner; he said it made him "logey" to dine late and interfered with his evening performances. Altogether we came nearer to the old intimacy and comradeship than we had known for several years. At Christmas time we planned the boy's first tree. We believed he was now old enough to appreciate it. Santa Claus now became a name to conjure with; it acted as a bribe to good behaviour or a threat of punishment.

Will and I went shopping together. The big toy-shops proved the most fascinating things in the world. We spent hours looking at the wonders of toy-land which the present-day child enjoys. Will said it made him feel like a boy and surely it brought out all the

youth in his nature. His eyes would snap and sparkle with delight over a miniature railway with practicable engine and carriages, electric head-lights, block signals and the like. "Gee! What wouldn't I have given for an outfit like that when I was a kid!" he would exclaim. As for me, I couldn't make up my mind which I enjoyed the most; the pretty children who crowded the shop or the toys they came to see.

We made several visits to Santa Claus land without being able to decide what would best please Boy. Experience advised us to have him make his own choice. When Experience took him for a tour of the shops he decided upon everything in the place. Suddenly the whole world faded into insignificance: "Senyder!" he stuttered, pointing imperiously to a dog whose breed seemed as indeterminate as the prototype. All dogs were Snyders to Boy, but perhaps the perpetual motion of the tail which wagged automatically reminded him most strongly of the original. It did no good to tell him that Santa Claus would bring Snyder down the chimney. Boy had his own ideas about fairies and their ilk. He refused to leave the shop without the dog. Needless to say the dog went home with us. Will never

could endure Boy's shrieks. But, in extenuation, let it be said that not one of the toys Boy found grouped about his tree on Christmas morning—and their name was legion—gave him the joy he found in the mongrel pup. Miss Burton sent a box from far-off San Francisco, where she was playing. The Chinese dolls interested him for a moment, but his heart was true to Snyder. He slept with him, shared his food with him, sobbed out his childish grief with Snyder in his arms, and refused to part with his faithful friend even when old age robbed him of his woolly coat and shiny eyes.

The star gave a party on Christmas Eve. When the curtain went down on the last act, the applause was choked off by the flashing on of the house lights. The stage-manager gave the order to strike, and in a short time the stage was clear. The carpenters then put together the improvised banquet board—great long planks of lumber resting upon saw-horses. From the iron landing of the first tier of spiral stairs upon which Will's dressing-room gave I watched the caterer's men lay the table. I had spent the latter part of the evening in the cubby hole—a rare occurrence, since I seldom went behind the scenes except with friends of Will's

who had attended the performance and who wanted to see what the back of the stage looked like.

Shortly before twelve o'clock the members of the company and a few outside guests assembled on the stage—where they were received by the star-hostess. In the midst of the chatter the lights went out. At first everyone thought it an accident until a bell in the distance chimed the witching hour. As the last stroke died away a faint jingle of sleigh bells wafted across the air. Nearer and louder they came, interspersed with the snap of a whip. A great shaft of light from above shot obliquely across the stage. From out of the clouds, as it seemed, a full-fledged Santa Claus descended like a flying machine. With the aid of a little "sneaky" music furnished by the orchestra and the faithful spot-light which dogged his very footsteps, Santy placed the huge tree in the centre of the table and unloaded his pack. With many a grotesque antic he surveyed his labour of love and finally, having sampled the contents of a decanter which graced the table, he rubbed his much padded pouch in satisfaction, laughed merrily, shouted a "merry Christmas to you all," and disap-

peared into the clouds. The effect was so bewitching and so eerie that old Kris received a spontaneous "hand" on his exit.

I thought of Boy and how much he would have enjoyed the scene. Myriad little lights twinkled like stars upon the wonderful trees. A warm, red glow poured from imaginary fireplaces off stage. To the accompaniment of ohs! and ahs! and a merry potpourri from the orchestra we took our seats at table. I am sure any audience would gladly have paid a premium for tickets to this special performance.

The supper proved to be an eight-course dinner. There was everything from nut-brown turkey to hot mince pie. The drinkables were varied and plentiful. I noticed that after the third or fourth course everybody was telling everybody else what a good actor he or she was. It developed into a veritable mutual admiration society. Will kicked me under the table several times when the character man told him what a good actor he was; it was common property that the character man "knocked" Will behind his back. The tall, good-looking girl I had noticed at rehearsals passed around a new diamond pendant

she had just received from her friend in New York.

"He's just crazy about you, ain't he?" chaffed one of the actors. The good-looking girl laughed and winked.

"He sure is," she answered, "and I never even gave him as much as *that,*" measuring off an infinitesimal speck of her thumb nail.

A shout of laughter greeted her remark. A little later when she got warmed up she made eyes at Will across the table and threw him violets from her huge corsage bouquet. "Ev'ry matinée day I send thee violets," she paraphrased in song, the significance of which was lost on me until some days later.

Toward the end of the dinner the packages were opened. Each memento was accompanied by a limerick hitting off the idiosyncrasies of the recipient, who was asked to read it aloud. Whoever composed the limericks was well paid for sitting up o' nights, for they caused a deal of merriment even if they were not entirely free from sting. After dinner there was vaudeville. The star gave some imitations of a *café chantant* which brought down the house. The musical director had composed a skit which he called "Very Grand Opera." The theme

hinged on a leave-taking of one or more characters from the other. The book consisted of one word; *farewell.* I had never realized how long-winded the farewells of opera are until I heard the parody. The humour of it quite spoiled the tender duos, trios and choruses of the genuine article.

Dear old Mr. and Mrs. —— contributed a cake-walk. No one suspected the grumpy old gentleman to have so much ginger in him. A good old Virginia reel and "Tucker" limbered everybody into action.

Before we dispersed, old Santa Claus—impersonated by one of the walking gentlemen—again donned his beard and buckskin and accompanied by a noisy crew carried the great tree to the boarding-house where the child-actress of the company was staying. At the street end of the alley which led from the stage-entrance a big burly policeman stopped them; they *were* noisy to be sure. But even the officer laughed when Santy touched him on the arm and in a "tough" dialect asked him, "Say Bill, do youse believe in fairies?"

If Will had any experiences in Boston only one came under my notice; rather, it was forced upon me. It was during the second

week of the engagement that Will began to bring me violets. Now, he had not shown me this attention for several years. I was too much flattered at the time to notice that the flowers always came on matinée days, after the performance. Will generally took a walk after a matinée. He said it refreshed him for the evening performance. He would come in, glowing from the exercise, simply radiating health and energy. I knew what time to expect him and I would sit listening for the elevator to stop on our floor. I knew Will's step the minute he came down the hall. When he opened the door I instinctively sniffed the fresh air he brought in with him. I liked to feel his cold cheek against mine . . . . and to hear him puff and growl to amuse Boy as he pulled off his heavy coat. He was irresistible. The violets came in a purple box with the imprint of the florist in gold letters. The first time he brought them he set the box on the table without handing them to me. One of my weaknesses is flowers.

"What's this?" I asked, pouncing upon the box.

"Open it and see," he answered with one of his quizzical sidelong glances.

"For me?" I asked a little dubiously. I lost no time in opening the box. If the shadow of a thought that an admirer of Will's had sent him the flowers flitted across my mind it was lost in Will's smile as he answered,

"For my best girl."

I buried my face in their cool depths. "Violets! O, the beauties! I like the single variety best, don't you, Will? They're so fresh and woodsy." Then my conscience smote me. Violets are expensive this time of year. "Will —weren't they *horribly* expensive?" Just the same I was pleased to death—as I had heard matinée girls say—and I made up my mind to forego something I needed to offset Will's flattering extravagance. I nursed and tended those violets until the next matinée day came round. When they faded I pressed them between blotting paper, intending when I got back home to put them away with other flowers Will had given me. . . . . .

It was on Tuesday, the day after Christmas. I had gone out with Mrs. Mollett to tea at a woman's club. The violets Will had brought me after the Christmas matinée were reinforced by some lilies of the valley. The huge bouquet looked particularly smart against

my fur coat. Mrs. Mollett and I were late in getting back. I felt sure I should miss Will, who was going out to dinner with some friends at a club. As I passed through the hall to the lift a bell-boy overtook me. He told me there was someone in the parlour waiting to see me. I asked for a card but none had been sent. Wondering who could be calling on me—I had so few acquaintances in Boston—and anticipating a pleasant surprise I followed the boy to the parlour on the second floor. It was a large room and I stopped in the portièred doorway half expectantly. The only occupant of the room was a tall person—whether woman or girl I could not discern. She stood with her back to the door, looking out the window. As she glanced over her shoulder with no sign of recognition I turned to go. The bell-boy, however, had waited behind me. "That's the lady who asked for you over there." He approached the girl, who turned timidly.

"You wanted to see Mrs. Hartley, didn't you? This is she."

It was probably the surprise of hearing correct English from the lips of a bell-boy which diverted my attention for a second. When I

looked at the visitor I saw that she had flushed and was overcome with confusion.

"There is—there appears to be some mistake," she stammered, addressing herself to the retreating boy and averting my gaze. "I asked to see Mr. Hartley—Mr. William Hartley," she called after the boy, though her voice was scarcely audible. She looked toward the door in a bewildered manner as if her only desire was to get away. There was something so distressing, so pathetic about her embarrassment; not a modicum of *savoir faire* or bluff to help her out. I found myself saying in a kindly tone that only added oil to the flames: "I am Mrs. Hartley; Mrs. William Hartley. Is there anything I can do?"

For a full minute we stood and looked at each other. Under the full light, which the boy had switched on as he went out, her face and figure were sharply limned. A tall woman has always the best of it in any controversy, though I am sure my *vis-à-vis* did not realize her advantage. If her mind was as confused as her face indicated she was to be pitied. She was not merely a plain woman; she was the epitome of plainness. Nature had not given her a single redeeming feature; there was not

even a hint of sauciness to the upturned nose; not a speculative quirk to the corner of the mouth or a fetching droop to the eyelids which sometimes illuminates the plainest of faces. Perhaps she realized the niggardliness of her gifts. There was an evident attempt at primping. Her hat sat uneasily upon a head unaccustomed to the hair-dresser's art. The shoes, too, I felt, were painful: they were so new and the heels so high, and unstable—a radical departure from the commonsense last which was as much a component part of her as the feet themselves. I visualized her home, her life and her commonplace associates . . . . . the eternal illusion of the stage . . . . . Will's magnetism, combined with the perfections and never-failing nobility of the stage hero. . . . I saw it all as clearly as I saw the strained, vari-expressioned face before me. All this in a brief fleeting moment. I smiled encouragingly. Her eyes met mine, then wavered and drooped, and drooping rested upon the violets —and we both understood. . . . . .

"Won't you sit down?" I said, leading the way to a divan with the idea of easing the situation. "Do have a pillow!—there, is that more comfortable? These sofas seem never

to fit in to one's back. . . . . I'm sorry Mr. Hartley is not in. Usually he *is* in at this hour, but to-night he is dining out. I know he will be sorry to have missed you, for I am sure he wants to thank you in person for the lovely flowers. Yes, he told me all about it and we both appreciated your sweetness in sending them. I hope Mr. Hartley wrote and properly thanked you,"—I rattled on, hoping to give her time to recover herself. "He is, as a rule, quite punctilious in these matters, but with the holidays and the extra matinées—" I finished with an expressive shrug. There was a disheartening silence.

"I think I must be going," she faltered at last, waiting for me to rise. "I'm afraid I've kept you too long. . . . You've been very kind. . . . I hope you haven't been shocked by . . . by . . . the unconventional way I . . . " Her speech came in jerks.

"Not at all," I answered, jumping in and anticipating my cue. "Not at all!" I reiterated, injecting more warmth in the confirmation than I intended. I walked with her to the elevator. "I'm sorry it is so late or I would ask you to stop for a cup of tea. But you will come again, won't you?—perhaps you'll telephone me one

morning—not *too* early——" I laughed a little as I pressed the button—"we're not early risers, and we'll arrange a time when Mr. Hartley can be with us. I want you to meet the boy—O, yes, we've got a baby, too! Of course, *we* think him the most wonderful baby in the world. Aren't parents a conceited lot?" . . . I pressed her limp hand and smiled good-byes as the lift bore her out of sight.

Then the smile went out of me. I felt angry with myself: I felt I had overdone it. What was the woman to me that I should exert myself to put her at ease with herself? She was but one of the silly creatures who "chase" the actor and pander to his vanity. I regretted the impulse which prompted me to ask her to tea. Truly, I had made a fool of myself. . . . At least, I had prevented her from making a farther fool of herself—and of me. . . .

I went to my room but did not turn on the light for fear of attracting Experience, whose room was across the court. She was probably waiting for me. I wanted to be alone. I removed the violets from my coat. My first impulse was to throw them out the window; then I thought better of it—and of her. They

represented a woman's illusions—no, two women's illusions. . . . Will had deliberately fooled me; even Miss Merdell, the tall good-looker, knew he was fooling me. That was what she meant when she chaffed him about the violets at the Christmas party. Perhaps it was not of great consequence, but, does a woman ever forgive a man for wounding her self-respect? . . .

I did not look at Will when I told him of the visitor. He extricated himself gracefully. He said he thought my perspicacity would have made me tumble to the truth and when I didn't he concluded it was a shame to put me wise. And, after all, what did it matter? He had brought the flowers home to me when it was an easy matter to have turned them over to the extra girls. . . .

Miss Gorr—that was her name—came to tea; in fact, she came several times. Will declared she was in a fair way of becoming a bore.

"For Heaven's sake, don't turn her loose on me," he expostulated. "I'm willing to give her photographs and advice but I don't want to be seen about with a freak like that!"

I caught myself wondering—and I was

ashamed of the thought—whether Will would have been bored were Miss Gorr not so hopelessly plain. Alice was *smart* and there had been others and would probably be more to come. I reached the point where I could shrug my shoulders indifferently. It was all a part of the game and I was learning to play it. . . .

CHAPTER IX

FOLLOWING Boston, the company played Philadelphia, Baltimore and Pittsburgh. Each city has its distinguishing characteristics, but certain types are to be found all over the country. There is always the "fly" married woman hanging about hotel lobbies, lying in wait for the actor or any dapper visitor who, like herself, is seeking diversion. She drops in for a cock-tail or a high-ball and looks things over. She has a sign manual of her own. The head-waiters know her and wink significantly when she comes in with her friends. These women are not prostitutes in the general acceptance of the word. They are products of our leisure class. Their husbands are business or professional men in good standing. With comfortable, even luxurious homes, or a stagnant life in a modern hotel, time hangs heavily upon their hands. They have no intellectual pursuits other than bridge and the "best seller." They pander to their worst desires and wallow

in their alcoholic-fed passions. These are the *stall-feds;* the drones; the wasters; the menace to the womanhood of America. These are they who are grist to the divorce mills; who clog the yellow press with prurient tales of passion; who stigmatize innocent children and handicap them even before birth; who breed and interbreed with such unconcern that it is indeed a wise child that knows its own father. And, in the end, when the Nemesis of faded charms overtakes them, the army of harlots is swelled.

The "neglected wife" has become a hoary old joke. It is worked to death. My husband is responsible for the statement that in nine cases out of ten women use this excuse to condone their own infidelity. "My husband doesn't understand me; he knows nothing but business, business, business. He doesn't realize there is another side to my nature which is utterly starved." Or, "My husband is interested elsewhere. What am I to do? For the sake of the children I don't want a divorce, and I am too proud to let him see how I feel it. I am only human."

That there are neglected wives a-plenty is a truism. But it is a spurious brand of pride

which sends a woman roaming, seeking the consolation of the Toms, Dicks and Harrys of the world. As for the children, there are greater evils than divorce. The influence of a house divided against itself, the surcharged atmosphere of deceit and degrading quarrels cannot fail to impregnate a child's mind, and probably at a time when character is being formed.

It is a lucky thing for the honour of the family that the actor is not less scrupulous. "They who kiss and run away may live to kiss another day" is probably indicative of the worst of his peccadillos. He takes the goods the gods provide and credits so much popularity unto his irresistible self. If occasionally he is "caught with the goods" it makes good copy for the yellows. Incidentally it advertises the actor. The woman pays the piper. "What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander" is likely to remain a nebulous supposition.

* * * *

There is only one Chicago. Other cities—Pittsburgh and Cincinnati notably—may be commonplace or vulgar, but Chicago is the epitome of commonplace vulgarity. It struck

me forcibly as I looked over the first-night audience. The men are commonplace; the women vulgar. The women impress one as ex-waitresses from cheap eating houses or sales-"ladies" who have married well. Few of the male population appear to own a dress-suit. The women wear ready-made suits with picture hats and a plentiful sprinkling of gaudy jewelry. Some of them "make-up" atrociously. Their manners are as breezy as the wind from the lake and they "make you one of them" the first time you meet. If there is a cultured set in Chicago the actor never meets them; it probably resides in Chicago through force of circumstances, not through choice. The middle class is super-commonplace. The smart set isn't smart; only fast and loose. Chicago is a good "show-town." It might be better if managers kept their word to send out the original companies. The Western metropolis resents a slight to its dignity.

Will's management, therefore, played a trump card when it sent the New York production and players. The house was sold out for weeks in advance. It was evidenced on the opening night that Will had left a good impression in Chicago from former visits. He received a

hand on his entrance. When a supporting actor is thus remembered it proves his popularity.

After the performance we went to the College Inn with some friends of Will's. Everybody who is *anybody* goes to that ill-ventilated hole below stairs; one gets a sort of *revue* of the town's follies. Chicago is hopelessly provincial. There is a profound intimacy with other people's affairs. Such purveyors of privacy as the Clubfellow and Town Topics must find it no easy matter to get copy which is not already common property, with the edge taken off. Our host and hostess of the evening kept up a running fire of gossip concerning the people about us.

At a table near-by sat a gross looking woman with a combative eye. Her escort was a pliable, colourless youth, who, I assumed, was her son. This person was on bowing terms with many of the *habitués* of the Inn. A number of actors lingered at her table and laughed effectively at her sallies. When Will told me she was a certain female critic on a Chicago newspaper I understood the homage paid her. I did not undertand, however, her reason for marrying the youth I assumed was her son.

Our hostess said something about the "grateful age" which I didn't understand. The lady critic wrote with a venomous pen when mood or grudge impelled her. Many an actor writhed under her lashes. It was rumoured, however, that her bark was a great deal worse than her bite and that if one approached her "in the right way" "she would eat out of your hand."

Ever since a person revelling under a euphonious *nom de plume,* which recalls to mind the romantic days of Robin Hood, perverted the function of dramatic criticism, imitators have sprung up all over the country. "Imitation is the truest flattery." To be caustically funny at the expense of truth, to deal in impudent personalia, to lose one's dignity in belittling that of others is the construction of the gentle art of criticism which American reviewers reserve unto themselves.

Will's friends were a convivial lot. Before the evening was over our party had been considerably augmented. Each newcomer added another round of drinks. "Have one with me" is a strictly American characteristic. When we broke up I had a handful of cards and a confused list of tea, dinner and supper engage-

ments. Fortunately I was not the only one to get mixed. Several of the whilom hostesses simplified matters by forgetting the invitations they had extended.

While we were waiting for the automobile one of the women chaffed Will in the following manner: "Why, you sly, handsome pup! You never told me you were married when you were here before."

"I supposed you knew," was Will's response.

"O, you did! Um! I never say anything about being married, either, when I go away for a lark. . . . Never mind, I'll forgive you if you'll call me up. Where are you stopping? How long is your wife going to be in town?" The rest was drowned in the approach of the car.

We did not go to Mamma Heward's this time. Heretofore when Will played Chicago we had lived at a theatrical boarding house kept by a dear little old Scotch lady. Her's was one of the few good ones throughout the country. Unfortunately one had to take a long trolley ride to reach her house and Will's performances ended late. Then, too, he had heard that the table had gone off and that the

service was inadequate. I imagine, however, that Will felt he had outgrown the boarding-house days. He decided upon a family hotel on the north side.

During the week I called on Mamma Heward and took Boy with me. It was the first time she had seen him and she raved over him sufficiently to satisfy even a young mother's vanity. She enquired after Will and had kept in touch with his progress. She had always been fond of him and had dubbed him Bobby Burns, whom he somewhat resembled. I saw she felt hurt by our apparent desertion and tried to assure her that we should be much happier and more comfortable with her; that if it were not for the distance from the theatre——

The dear little old lady patted my hand as if to spare me further dissemblance.

"That's the excuse they all give, but it's no farther than ever it was and the theatres are as near as ever they were," she said sadly, the Scotch burr falling musically upon the ear. "It isn't that. . . . They're forgetting me now they're getting up in the world. It didn't use to be too far when they couldn't pay more than eight or ten dollars a week for their board

. . . and the little suppers Mamma had waiting for them after the theatre. . . ."

She sighed but there was no trace of bitterness. "It's what you must expect when you get old and worn out. . . . It's the way of the world and God was always harder on women than he is on men."

There was no answer I could make; I could not have spoken had there been anything to say. I felt choked and on the verge of tears. It was all so pitiful. There was an air of desolation about the place. The warmth which prosperity radiates was no longer evident. Where formerly there had been leading players, even a star or two, now there were only the lower ranks, and but few of them. Nothing remained of the good old days save the rows and rows of photographs which lined the walls, all of them autographed and inscribed "With love, to Mamma Heward." Arm in arm we reviewed this galaxy of players.

"There is ——," she said, stopping in front of a well-known actor. "And that's his first wife. She was a dear, good girl. I'm afraid Herbert didn't treat her as well as he should. Many's the time she has cried out her heart

in Mamma's arms. . . . She's married again —no, not an actor—and she's got two boys, the littlest one the size of yours. . . . Now could you ever guess who that is? Yes, that's —— when he was leading man with Modjeska. The women were crazy about him. . . . And he was a dear—such a kind-hearted man. I remember once how he kept the furnace going when our man got drunk and disappeared for three days. If only I had a picture of him shovelling in coal—his sleeves rolled up and spouting Macbeth at the top of his lungs. . . . Dear old Morry! He was his own worst enemy. . . ."

She sighed heavily over the actor's bad end. "And there! Do you recognize that? And isn't the boy the livin' image of his father?"

I looked more closely at the photograph. Boy's resemblance to his father was even more clearly marked in some of Will's earlier pictures.

"Do you remember the first time you came to me? You hadn't been married long. You had a dog, a bull terrier pup. Let me think, now, what was his name? Yes, Billy, that's it! And do you mind how ye locked him up in your bathroom when you went to the theatre

and how he ate the matting off the floor while ye was gone?"

We both laughed at the recollection, though I had not laughed at the time. I was in fear lest Billy be relegated to the cellar where he would cry out his puppy heart. But Mamma Heward was never in a bad humour. She was all kindness and consideration . . . and now she was getting old and could no longer please an exacting clientèle. The cost of living had gone up; rents were higher; but the little old lady could get no more for her rooms. To make both ends meet she dispensed first with one servant, then with another, until she and one frail daughter shared the entire work of the house. It was no easy matter to cook and serve a dozen breakfasts in the rooms at any and all hours; to cater and prepare meals and then to wait up until midnight that the players might have a hot supper after the performance. How many of those whom she had tided over the hard times, how many who had "stood her up" for a board bill, or whom she had nursed in times of illness, remembered her now in her time of need?

"I'm not finding fault," she said softly, breaking a long silence while we looked beyond

the pictures. "I don't blame them for not coming here to live . . . only—I wish they'd drop in to see me sometimes when they come to town, just for auld lang syne. . . ."

When I told Will of my visit he looked very serious. I am sure he felt sorry we had not gone back to her. The next day we went together to see her. Will took her a bottle of port wine. Later he sent her two seats for the performance and I promised her that the next time we came to Chicago we should stay with her, even if Will were a star. . . .

CHAPTER X

WILL'S friends certainly provided one continual round of pleasure, if dissipation may be classed under that head. I was brought to wonder how they found time for "the petty round of irritating concerns and duties" of life. They appeared always to be dining or lunching out. One met them in the various restaurants at all hours, drinking round upon round of cocktails, and polishing them off with cognac. The Pompeian room at the Annex between five and six in the afternoon is Chicago typified. The artistic gentleman who conceived the decorative scheme of the Pompeian room had a sly sense of the eternal fitness of things. He also knew his Chicago. The great bacchic amphoræ—copies of those classic receptacles utilized as relief stations by old Romans who had wined too well—are concrete reminders of his sense of humour. I have seen more women in Chicago under the influence of liquor than in any other city in the world. This probably

accounts for their low standard of morality as well as for the emotional debauches in which they indulge.

There was one couple typical of the class of high-flyers in which Chicago abounds. The husband was a throat specialist with a splendid practice. He was popular among stage-folk. Will had met the doctor and his wife during a former engagement. The wife expressed herself as "strong for" Will. Scarcely a day passed without a telephone message or a call from Mrs. Pease. She would drop in at the most inopportune times. "Don t mind me," she would say, settling herself comfortably. "I've seen gentlemen in dressing-gowns before. That red is very becoming to your peculiar style of beauty, sir. Nothing if not artistic."

Mrs. Pease was a tall woman, built on the slab style. She affected mannish tailormades and heavy boots. When she sat down she invariably crossed her legs. The extremities she exhibited were not prepossessing. She was also expert in innuendo and *double entente*. She flirted outrageously with Will and made me feel like the person in the song, "Always in the way." In fact I came to the conclusion that wherever we went I was accepted as a

necessary evil—among the women. There was always a "pairing off" after dinner or supper; surreptitious *rendezvous* in the obscure cosey corners; *sotto voce* conversations, not intended for my ears. I found myself getting the habit of talking stupid nonsense with persons in whom I was not interested, simply to cover the follies of the others.

The men flattered me. Flattery is a habit with men; they think most women expect it—and they do. After a little practice a woman can tell to a certainty just what a man is going to say under certain conditions. How can any one be flattered by the saccharine platitudes which are ground out automatically like chewing-gum from a slot-machine? So few women have a sense of humour. They have less self-respect.

Chicago lake-wind claimed me for a victim. I came down with a bad throat. Will insisted upon my consulting his physician friend. He was a handsome chap—this popular Doctor Pease—as blonde as Will was dark, but already marked with the ravages of dissipation. He had a genial raillery which made it almost impossible to take him seriously. I did not know whether it was a part of the treatment

to unbare my throat and shoulders and sound my lungs and to let his hand linger on the uncovered flesh, but I didn't like it. Neither did I believe my age, my weight and my bust measure had any connection with my throat trouble. Of course I didn't tell Will anything about it, but the next time I needed treatment I asked him to accompany me. Will liked the doctor, so I kept my own counsel.

One noon-day Mrs. Pease telephoned that they were going off on a motor trip for a tour of the country clubs, at one of which they had planned to dine. They wanted me to join them and after the matinée they would send a car to pick up Will, anl return him in time for the evening performance. I told Will I did not want to go, giving the excuse that my throat was still sore. Mrs. Pease answered that the doctor said the air would do me good and that he would be responsible for me. I endeavoured to compromise by promising to meet them at the theatre after the matinée when they picked up Will, but the doctor himself came to the 'phone and Will decided for me.

When the telephone announced the arrival of the party I went down to the reception

room, where I found the doctor awaiting me. He bundled me into my great fur coat and insisted upon my wearing a fur cap his wife had sent me. He cautioned me to wrap up well, as the car was an open one. When we went out, as I supposed, to join the others, I was surprised to find that the doctor was alone.

"The rest of them have gone on ahead," he answered my enquiring look. "I was detained at the office and told them not to wait on us. We'll overtake them if the car is in good shape."

I felt strangely uncomfortable as I took my seat beside him in the racing machine. He secured the robes about me with his easy familiarity and tucked me in with a good deal of care. As he seated himself at the wheel and drew on his gloves he smiled at me and asked whether I was timid. He said he made it a rule to kiss a woman whenever she screamed. That was not a propitious beginning, I thought. The doctor drove skillfully, although recklessly.

The boulevard system of Chicago is an excellent one. We covered miles of smooth paving, from which the snow had been removed, before we reached the country roads. After

he had "let her out a bit" and showed me what she could do, he slowed up and turned to me with a little laugh, "That's going some, isn't it?" It struck me at the time that "going some" was probably the motto on the city's escutcheon. Everybody wants to be faster than everybody else.

The air *was* exhilarating. My face tingled from the contact with the wind. The doctor's glances made me uncomfortable. "You look like a rosy-cheeked boy," he said. "I'd like to bite you." I silently thanked the stars the car was an open one.

Farther on we stopped at a country club. The doctor said it was a long time between drinks. As we drove into the club-grounds I noticed another motor under the shed. I hoped it might belong to other members of the party. The doctor made straight for the shed. When I looked at the deep snow, and only a narrow path cleared to the club house, I apprehended some silliness on the part of my host.

Disregarding his suggestion to sit still while he put up his machine, I climbed down and picked my way over the slippery path. I had not gone far when the doctor overtook me and,

seizing me from behind, lifted me in his arms. Not even the presence of the men shovelling snow prevented. My first impulse was to free myself, and I believe I administered a kick or two. The more I remonstrated the more he laughed. The picture of making a ridiculous show of myself made me submit to being carried the rest of the way.

After ushering me into the living-room the doctor had the good sense to leave me alone for a while. By the time he appeared I had sufficiently recovered my equilibrium to receive him frostily. My dignity was lost on him. He pulled up a great armchair in front of the roaring fire and bade me drink the hot scotch the waiter at that moment brought in. A subdued titter from an obscure corner of the room sent the doctor in search of other occupants. He discovered them behind a screen.

"Aha!" he greeted them in mock-seriousness. "Discovered!"

"Stung"; responded a masculine voice. "So this is why you wouldn't join our party, eh? You sneaked off by yourselves. I didn't think anybody but me would have the nerve to try this place so soon after the snow-storm."

"Neither did we!"

"For Heaven's sake don't give us away, will you?" It was the woman who spoke. . . . "Who've you got with you?" she added in a lower tone.

"O, a little friend of mine," answered the doctor. "Come over and meet her. I think you know her husband—Hartley, the actor."

I fear the couple whose *rendezvous* we had discovered were not impressed with the popular actor's wife. My conversation was limited to monosyllables. The omission, I fancy, was not serious. They had their own topic of conversation. It revolved chiefly around the tenth commandment. In fact, one might conclude with perfect assurance that the seventh and the last of the commandments are the *raison d'être* of all conversation among that set. . . . I lost count of the drinks. The doctor said that in the future he would provide Maraschino cherries by the bottle for my especial delectation.

When we left the club it was dark. The doctor's friends went at the same time. They had a chauffeur. The doctor's bloodshot eyes made me wish we, too, had one. The cold air, happily, set him right. He drove more

carefully than earlier in the day. Perhaps he recognized his own condition. Once he slowed down and looked at his watch.

"We're going to be late," he said. "I've half a mind to telephone that we've picked up a puncture and have gone back to town for repairs. What do you say?" He appeared to be turning the matter over in his mind, but I could see that he was not taking me into consideration.

"No, we can't do that," I said without too much emphasis. "Mr. Hartley would be worried."

He smiled at me as he replaced his watch. "Yes, I guess you're right; it will have to wait until some other time." He patted the covers above my lap. "Little Girl," he murmured, rather too tenderly. I was glad I could not see his eyes. The car shot ahead. For the next half hour I had a bewildering sense of flying over the snow-clad earth, coming now and then in contact with it as the car struck a rut. The lights, striking against the stalactited branches of the trees and foliage, scintillated like the tiara of a comic-opera star—or the Diamond Horseshoe on society night at the Metropolitan.

We were the last ones to arrive at the country club where we were to dine. This time the doctor dropped me at the door. Someone was drumming the piano as I came in. By the time I had taken off my wraps the doctor joined me. There was a general noisy greeting when we entered the great hall. Nearly all of the women I had met before. "I thought the doctor had smashed you up," one of them said. "Or punctured a tire and gone back to town," another added, giving the doctor a broad wink.

"Leila's gone back to town to get Mr. Hartley," volunteered someone else. (Leila was Mrs. Pease.)

I settled myself in a niche of the chimney-seat, hoping to thaw out eventually. I was chilled to the very depths of my being, and it was not altogether physical. There were lots and lots of cocktails before dinner. Judging from the spirits of the company there had been a few before we arrived. When I heard that Mrs. Pease herself was driving the car in which she had gone to fetch Will, I had visions of his being dumped into a snow-bank or of colliding with a trolley. It seemed an interminable time until they appeared. We had

reached the entrée. There was a noisy greeting and a round of sallies.

"Explain yourself!'

"We thought you'd eloped or got locked up for speeding!"

"Stopped on the road, I'll bet," said the doctor, who had risen and grasped Will's hand. Will waved to me across the table.

"O, you actor!" came from the woman at my right but one. I recognized the person who had reproved Will after the supper at the College Inn on the opening night.

When the champagne was served Will raised his glass to me.

"Drink it—it won't hurt you; you look tired," he said, in a stage whisper.

"Stop flirting with your wife!" remonstrated Mrs. Pease. "Doc—*Doc!*" (The doctor was busy with a little blonde lady on the left.) He turned enquiringly to his wife's bleat. "You're neglecting your patient. Handsome Willy here says his wife is pale and wants to know what you've been doing to her!"

The doctor leaned over me solicitously. "Never mind—I'm the doctor." For the rest of the meal he devoted himself to me.

During the dinner a party of five came in

and sat at another table. Two of them proved to be the couple we had met at the other country club. The man winked discreetly to the doctor.

"Ye gods!" exclaimed the woman at my left but one. "It's Sid!—and I'm supposed to be home, sick in bed with a headache!"

She looked at the man I had met and I assumed he was "Sid." "Damn such a town, anyway, where you can't go out without running into your own husband. Doc, who's he got with him?" She leered across the room at "Sid's" good-looking companions.

"Never mind, Bell," soothed the doctor, "neither of you have got anything on the other."

Bell blew him a kiss. "Dear old painkiller!" she purred.

A little later "Sid" came over to the table and the doctor joined the other party. Sid's wife started to introduce him to me.

"I've met the lady," he interrupted, not giving me credit for any discretion.

"O, you have," she said in an unpleasant tone.

As he passed on behind her chair he said to

her *sotto voce,* "Headache, eh? I like the way you lie."

"O, you go to hell!" was the gentle rejoinder. There was still a trace of the anger which illuminated her bleary eyes when she turned to me. "What do you think of him trying to put it over me?"

She steered back to the subject which was on her mind. Where had I met her husband and when? I told her I didn't recall—that he was probably mistaken. She knew I was lying. I am sure I don't know why I did it.

Someone started telling funny stories. They were not really funny; only smutty. The women were more daring than the men. Will always declared that women were "whole hoggers" when once they started. I presume they labour under the impression that it is sporty or that it pleases the men "to go them one better." Ever since Eve was made for Adam's pleasure the female sex has been as pliable as the original mixture of mud and a floating rib. Women, generally, are what men want them to be. . . .

As time went by I began to fret lest Will be late for the evening performance. Finally I caught his eye and he understood my message.

He looked at his watch and jumped to his feet. "Doc, what's the best time your machine can make? I've got precisely twenty minutes before the curtain goes up."

"I'll get you there," answered the doctor as he left the table.

"I'll drive him in," called the doctor's wife.

"No, I guess not!" he answered over his shoulder. I devoutly, if mutely, thanked heaven. I am sure the doctor realized that his wife was "three sheets to the wind"—to use Will's favourite expression.

I made my adieus and rose to follow Will.

"Where are you going?" called Mrs. Pease. "No, you don't—you don't shake us like this! Willy, tell your wife to sit down and behave herself." In vain I expostulated that I must go back to the baby. "Never mind the kiddie; he's asleep and don't even know he's got a mother." She followed us into the hall where the doctor and Will were hurrying into their fur coats.

"You can't go this trip, little lady," and the doctor pushed me out of the draughty doorway. "There's no room in the car and we're going to ride like hell." I appealed mutely to Will, who drew me aside.

"Stick it out a little longer, girlie. They'll feel hurt if you don't. You can telephone to the hotel if you're anxious about the boy." He kissed me lightly. I felt on the verge of rebellion.

"Shall you be late?" I managed.

"No—unless something breaks down on the way. I'm not on until after the rise, and if necessary I'll go on without my make-up."

"Come on, Hartley!" The doctor was already at the wheel. We watched them spurt ahead.

"I hope your husband's insured," gurgled one of the women. . . . I felt sick and wretched. I wanted to go home, even if it were only a hotel room. Home was where Boy was. I had a wild impulse of stealing out unnoticed and asking my way to the nearest trolley line. Then I remembered I had not a cent in my purse.

The return of the doctor relieved my mind as to Will's safe arrival. I comforted myself with the thought that the party would soon break up. The diners across the room had joined us before the return of the doctor. There was another round of liqueurs and at last someone moved to break up. "Sid's" wife,

whose tongue was getting thick, suggested that we all go for a drive and end up by having supper at Rector's. There was general acquiescence. "Let's make a night of it," was the slogan.

While the others were dividing themselves to suit the accommodation of the various automobiles, Mrs. Pease and I went to the dressing-room. "Lord! Don't I look a sight?" she exclaimed, scanning her reflection in the mirror. "That's the worst of booze; it makes me white around the gills." She daubed on a bit of rouge and patted it over with a powder puff. I took advantage of our tête-à-tête and asked her if she would be so good as to arrange to drop me at my hotel on the way back.

"Why, my dear, you're not going home yet; you're going right along with us."

"I really must not. . . . Mr. Hartley wouldn't approve, I know. I have not been well and——"

"Rot! You leave that to the doctor. He'll stop and leave a note at the theatre. . . . Doc! *Doc!* Come here. . . ." The doctor peeped in the doorway.

"O, come in—we're only powdering our noses," Mrs. Pease called to him. "Say, look

here! Mrs. H. thinks hubby might not approve of her going on with us——"

"I didn't mean—" I began.

"I tell her you'll fix it up with him," she interrupted.

"It's fixed—long ago. I told your husband we'd come for him after the show. He'll want a bite to eat anyway, and why not be sociable? He told me to tell you to be a good little sport and wait for him." He laid an arm around my shoulders and Mrs. Pease, still busy in front of the mirror, laughed in mock seriousness.

"O, don't mind me!"

"Did Mr. Hartley—did my husband say he expected me to wait?"

"Sure Mike," broke in Mrs. Pease. "Doc, you go pilot that bunch so they don't butt into my preserves. Saidee is soused, and when Saidee gets soused she gets nasty drunk." The doctor disappeared. "I can't stand for women who don't know their capacity," Mrs. Pease continued, working on her complexion. "You're a wise little gazabo to go slow on the fizz. I watched you to-night, and the way you manipulated the glasses was a scream. . . . Do you know you made a great hit with the doctor?

You're just his style—dark eyes, full bust and not 'higher than his heart.' . . . O, I'm not jealous! The Doc and I are on to each other." She winked at me and led the way to the hall.

"On to each other." . . . I mulled over the expression as I watched husbands and wives pairing off with and showing their preference for someone else. Everybody seemed to be "on to each other." It was a game of *stalemates.*

I drove back with the doctor. There was no way out of it without making a scene. "Sid" and the doctor engaged in a brush along the road. The reckless speeding fitted in with my mood. There were moments when I almost wished that something would break and land me with some broken bones, if nothing more. I was smarting under Will's obvious lack of consideration. He knew the atmosphere was not a congenial one, yet he sacrificed me to it without hesitation. I wanted with all my heart to have him popular and sought after; I was willing to play the game—up to a certain point. But when the game entailed a loss of self-respect, of confidence, or of equivocation with one's better instincts, there I drew the line. It ceased to be worth the candle.

I could no longer shut my eyes to the encroachments upon our happiness the very exigencies of his profession demanded. My passionate and childish efforts at blind man's buff were not convincing. The time had come when my husband and I must have a complete understanding. I must make clear to him how I felt. After that, if he were still blind to the dangers which threatened our life—no, I would not dwell on such a contingency. I felt sure Will would see things at their true valuation. For the first time that day I settled back to something approaching a state of composure. One always feels less perturbed after determining upon a course of action. I resolved to see the evening through with as much equanimity as possible. There was something grimly humorous about the situation: if Will really wanted to make a sport of me I was "cutting my eye-teeth" with a vengeance.

So engaged was I with my own thoughts I had not noticed that we had slowed up. Coincidentally the car came to a stop. The doctor rose to his feet and looked behind him.

"Anything wrong?" I questioned.

"No; I only wanted to make sure the coast was clear."

He knelt with one knee on the seat and pulled the robe about me from behind. With his free hand he raised my face close to his, and held me there.

"I'm going to have one kiss from those luscious lips—if it takes a leg," he said.

The doctor was a strong man. Will had often remarked that no one would suspect me of having so much strength. Yet I was a mere child in the doctor's hands. He pinioned my arms beneath the weight of his body. He kept his lips on mine until the strength oozed out of my finger-tips from sheer suffocation. When he raised his head it was only to look at me and breathing hard again to fasten himself upon me with a fiercer tremor which shook his whole frame. . . . Only once or twice in all our married life had Will kissed me like that. I had believed it an expression of purest love. I realized now that it connoted other emotions less pure. . . . "Baby! Baby! . . . Put your arms around my neck. . . . You haven't fainted, have you?" . . . He lifted me to my feet. I could not repress a hysterical sob. "There—that's better! I didn't mean to be so rough, but I'm mad about you. You drive me crazy! Kiss me of your own free will. . . ."

I succeeded in holding him back while I looked him in the eyes, struggling to express what my lips refused to say. . . . "O . . . O . . ." I finally stammered. "Is it right? . . . Do you think it's right? . . ."

Wholly misconstruing my words, he strained me to him and kissed me more tenderly, endeavouring to soothe me. "Right? Little boy, who the devil cares whether it's right or not! It's nice, isn't it? Don't you love it?"

"My husband . . . do you think it's right to him? . . ."

Something of the disgust I felt must have pierced him, for he released me with a change of expression.

"O, come now—don't spring that old gag on your friend the Doc. . . . What do you care as long as he doesn't get on to it? . . . You know as well as I do that a good-looking fellow in his profession has it thrown at him from all sides. You don't think he turns 'em *all* down, do you? You've got too much sense for that. . . . Come on, now . . . let's understand each other. . . . You're as safe with me as a babe on its mother's breast. . . . I'll call you up on Saturday and we'll go off some

place together . . . where we can talk it over. . . . God, Baby! I'm crazy about you! . . ."

* * * *

When Will and I walked into our rooms at the hotel the little travelling clock on my bureau pointed the hour of three. I slipped out of the fur coat the doctor had loaned me and left it in a heap upon the floor. I don't know how long I stood contemplating space. . . . Then I heard him cross the room and pick up the coat. I felt his eyes fastened upon me. I roused myself and went into the bedroom, where I began to take down my hair in front of the mirror. Will followed me and I saw that he was watching me in the glass. After a moment he spoke to me.

"Girlie . . . " his voice was kind. . . . "You'll have to learn to gauge your capacity. . . . You're not a tank like the rest of the crowd. . . . Look at your face; it's as red as a red, red rose—and has been all evening."

He patted me on the arm and went into the bathroom. I felt as if I were going to shriek. . . . *Will thought I was drunk.* . . . I

looked at myself in the glass. . . . My face was drawn and there were red burning spots in my cheeks. . . . My eyes peered out like two burnt holes in a blanket. . . . Yes, it was plain to see that I was not myself. . . . I smothered a burst of hysterical laughter. . . . I started toward the bathroom where Will was preparing for bed. I intended to tell him that in all, during the entire day, I had taken only one glass of champagne —and that at his request. . . . Then I stopped. I did not dare to trust myself. . . . I knew he would laugh and pet me and say he had not meant to criticize and then he would take me in his arms . . . and I would cry it all out upon his heart. . . . I would tell him the whole miserable experience . . . and he . . . what would *he* do? If he called the doctor to account there would be a scandal. . . . It would be degrading. . . . I could never endure it. . . . *And if he did not call the Doctor to account—if he merely cut him without demanding satisfaction,* I should *despise* him—I should *hate* him. . . . "O, yes you would—you *know* you would, though you wouldn't acknowledge it even to yourself"

. . . it was Miss Burton's voice. . . . "Take my advice—better not tell him at all." I switched off the light, so that Will could not see my face. . . .

* * * *

CHAPTER XI

I REVELLED in the heavy cold which kept me indoors. No amount of urging or cajoling on the part of my husband could induce me to see the doctor. Were I to express a preference for some other physician, Will's suspicions might be aroused. Experience applied old-fashioned remedies and in a few days I was able to be about the room. Mrs. Pease telephoned daily and called several times in person. Will saw her, but Experience had been instructed that I could see no one. During my retirement I had turned things over in my mind, arguing *pro* and *con* the advisability of a thorough understanding with Will. It appeared to me that the danger of such a proceeding lay in the tearing down of barriers which could never again be replaced—a rending aside of all illusion between us. Heretofore I had refrained from any expression of animadversion of his profession or his conduct. If he suspected any dissatisfaction on my part he preferred to let it pass without comment.

Spasmodically he indulged in bursts of confidence—confidences of the kind not calculated to improve my opinion of his profession. At such times he appeared fully to appreciate the corroding atmosphere in which he lived. He even contemplated retiring from the stage. These phases were rare, however, generally attending a disappointment in a rôle, discontent with an engagement or unfavourable criticism of his work. The mood soon passed and he appeared to be content with the ephemeral joys of the moment.

The longer I brooded over the subject the less sure I became of any good to be attained by a frank expression of my mind. Were I to eliminate all circumlocution and say: "My husband, there is something fundamentally wrong with a profession which demands a compromise with one's best instincts," or "the class of people with which you come in daily contact make for your ultimate degradation," or, again, "I do not approve of your petty deceits, the complacency with which you accept moral obliquity, the low standard which permeates our entire life," this would call for amplification, an indulgence in personalities which could result only in a greater breach between us. I

might even be accused of jealousy, inconsideration for his future, and a lack of faith in the man.

It had often occurred to me that there was such a thing as too great intimacy, a too careless frankness between husband and wife! A lack of reserve which ended in a secret contempt for each other's weaknesses. To be tolerant of and to respect these weaknesses while striving to stimulate the best in each other's nature; in short, to be a complement, each to the other, this appeared to me the basic principle of marriage. And as I had done in the past I again fell back upon my inner self. I wanted, O, I so wanted to develop the best that was in him . . . and there was much, nearly all of him was good. The danger lay in environment. . .

One day—it was a week later that Will had planned to dine at the Press Club—I lay on the couch watching Boy. He sat on a fur rug on the floor, playing with Snyder. Experience had gone down to an early dinner. There was a knock on the door. I called out, "Come in." It was the doctor.

"I took advantage of my professional capacity and came up unannounced," he said, easily,

without directly looking at me. He removed his coat and tickled Boy's face with the tail of the fur lining. Boy drew up his nose and laughed at the sensation, and the doctor dropped the coat upon the floor for him to play with. Then he squatted beside him while Boy stroked the fur and called it "cat." For several minutes the doctor busied himself with the child, deploring the deformities of Snyder and imitating a dog's bark.

"Great boy, that!" he concluded, rising to his feet and taking a long breath.

"Now, then, tell me all about it," he said, drawing up a chair in a purely professional manner and looking at me without a trace of self-consciousness. "You're pale; that's what you get for not sending for the doc. How's your pulse?" He reached for my hand and held it regardless of my frowning face. . . . "Rotten . . . you need a tonic. I'll write a prescription right off." There was silence while he wrote. Then he rose, placed the slip of paper on the table, tossed the boy in the air and crossed back, looking down at me with his hands in his pockets.

"Well, little girl, what have you got to say for yourself? . . . I suppose you're still sore

on me . . . forget it and forgive. I apologize. I acted like a beast, I know. . . It was the booze. It got the better of my judgment. Just the same, *in vino veritas,* I was most terribly stuck on you—and still am—no, sit still! I'm cold sober. . . . I thought, of course, you were like the rest. . . . Come, shake hands with me and say all is forgiven. I saw your husband today and he told me to come and see you. . . . I knew then that it was all right. . . . I felt sure you had too much common sense to tell hubby. . . . When are you coming out of the nunnery? . . ." He threw himself into the chair and smiled genially. I was holding fast to something he had said: "I thought of course you were like the rest." . . .

"Doctor, will you answer me a question—truthfully, I mean?"

"I will if I can," he flashed back at me.

"You said a few minutes since that you had thought me like the rest. Who did you mean by 'the rest'—women as a class—the class you go about with—or the women of the stage?"

"Well . . . if you want the honest truth—I had actresses in mind when I spoke."

"You believe actresses are any worse, even

as bad, as the women I met at dinner last week?"

"Um . . . ye-s . . . I think actresses would go farther."

"Go farther!"

"Yes. None of these women—at least not many of them—you've met would really go the limit. They do a good deal of playing around the edge, but it's only once in a while they get into a scrape. . . . Look here! I don't hold a brief for judging the relative virtues of women. I don't blame anybody for squeezing all the enjoyment they can out of life—for you don't know what's coming hereafter."

The doctor showed signs of irritation. . . . A sound from Boy suggested my next remark.

"Suppose one has children?"

"That's a horse of another colour. . . . Though when you come right down to it I don't see that a family cuts much ice. Children are for the most part accidents. They just happen. Their conception is the result of carelessness or laziness. Their ultimate arrival is accepted a good deal like a deluge or a fire; you do everything you can to stop it—to the verge of self-destruction—then you throw up your

hands and accept the inevitable. There isn't one love child in a million. I mean a child of love in the sense of premeditated and welcome conception. Men and women marry for one of a half dozen reasons, most commonly because they believe they are in love. When the honeymoon wanes and you get right down to commonplace, every-day life in all its ugliness, we begin to feel that we've been buncoed. If we are truthful with ourselves we acknowledge a share of the bunco game. Way back in our subconscious mind the sensation of our courtship, the pursuit and the first mad moments of possession have stuck fast. . . . We fairly throb at the thought of them. We begin to hanker for a repetition of these sensuous dope-dreams. . . . Presently we are off hot for the chase . . . and a little dash of the forbidden fruit acts as a stimulant. Like all stimulants it becomes necessary to increase the dose after a while to insure efficacy. That's where we begin to slop over. . . ." The doctor leaned back with the air of one who is satisfied with his diagnosis.

"We are getting away from the subject," I remarked caustically.

"Not a bit of it . . . we're running along converging lines. The stage is the mart for the prettiest and most magnetic of women. A pretty woman may be moral, but the chances are against it. Every man looks upon her as so much legitimate loot. They differ only in their methods of getting away with it. Sometimes they effect a legitimate sale: this is what our social system calls marriage. More often the rate of exchange is usurious on the part of the man. It varies from a bottle of wine and a few pretty clothes to a diamond necklace and equally brilliant promises. . . . Now here's where our lines converge. The stage is a good place to show goods. Our eternal chase bids us go in and look 'em over—and—if you are in a mood to trade—to say nothing of having the price—you'll find a bevy of ambitious beauties with a keen eye to business."

"You infer, then, that the society lady sins for love only—and that the actress bestows her affection for purely mercenary motives?"

"I don't make any such broad distinction as that—but I believe the actress has always an eye on the main chance and that she wouldn't let a little thing like love interfere with business. . . . The society woman, on the other

hand, usually goes wrong because she's unhappily married and tries to make up for what's missing by stealing a little happiness on the side."

"Then I am to believe that the stories one reads about lovers who present other men's wives with bejewelled gold purses and other little feminine gew-gaws are wholly fictitious; pure emanations from the brain of newspaper reporters—or the French dramatist . . . and from the divorce records?"

The doctor threw back his head and roared like a lion. . . .

"Perhaps you'll be good enough to tell me under what head you classified me—being neither a love-lorn society lady nor an ambitious actress with an eye to the main chance. . . ."

The doctor sobered to the point of anger. "I have told you that I am sorry. . . . I have apologized. . . . After all, what are we rowing about? You've proved an alibi—you're not like the rest—so let's forget it."

"I *can't* forget it. . . . You are judging a whole class by a few individuals who share your perverted ideas . . . individuals who would be immoral in a nunnery. . . . Would any of the women of your set—name any one

of them—would she—*could* she be less moral on the stage? Impossible! I don't believe you when you say none of them would 'go the limit!' Women who drink as much as they do; women whose tongues are furred with vulgar stories; women who proclaim they are *'on* to their husbands' and that their husbands are *on* to them and still continue to live under the same roof, occupy the same beds; women who write other women's husbands love letters and arrange places of assignation . . . do you mean you do not *know* these women 'go the limit'?" . . . My indignation and resentment had swept me like a storm and left me weak and bedraggled. The doctor made no response. . . . I felt that he was watching me. After a while I proceeded more quietly. . . .

"The trouble with you, doctor, is that you form your opinions from the newspapers. The man who writes the headlines believes it is his bounden duty to accentuate any and everything pertaining to the stage. The most obscure chorus girl is 'an actress.' Every divorcée whose antics have emblazoned the hall of ill-fame expects to become an actress and the newspapers record her aspiration in large type.

A police court magistrate in New York once told me that three-fourths of the women arrested on the streets for accosting men gave their occupations on the police blotter as 'actress.' Do you think any yellow sheet ever let an opportunity like that go by? . . . If all the petty affairs of your clients or your friends and casual acquaintances, both scandalous and innocuous, were printed from week to week, do you think there would be an appreciable difference between the standard of morality of the doctors, the dentists, the butchers and bakers and that of the actor? . . . I don't think you take into consideration that the actor's life is public property. He is denied the right of privacy in all matters. Nothing is too trivial, too delicately personal, to be shared with the public."

"And who's to blame for that, my lady, but the player himself? Publicity is his stock in trade. He's got to advertise, or drop out. . . . If ever I want a divorce, I'll dig up an actor as co-respondent: not because there may not be others, but because the actor would appreciate the advertisement." . . . The doctor leaned toward me to better enjoy my discomfiture, then laughed tormentingly.

I rose to my feet; he accepted his congé lingeringly.

"Well, at any rate I've done you good; your face has got back its colour." . . . He stood contemplating me for a second.

"You know . . . you've got a good deal of think works under that dusky head—only don't think too much. . . . It's bad business for a woman of your temperament." He turned to pick up his coat. Boy had fallen asleep upon it, nestling close to the warm fur. "What a shame to disturb him—don't do it. I can do without the coat until I get home." I lifted Boy gently and carried him still asleep to the bedroom beyond. The doctor followed to the alcove and stood watching while I covered the child. Then he picked up his coat and threw it over his arm.

"I guess you're equal to holding Handsome Bill by the leading strings, all right. . . . Hartley's a fine chap; one of the nicest actors I ever knew, and I'm downright fond of him." . . .

I could not repress a sneer in the safety of the twilight. It was not lost on the doctor.

"I know what you are thinking about," he said quietly, "but you know as well as I that

where there's a woman in the case there's about as much honour among men as there is among thieves." . . . He stretched out his hand. "Good-bye, little girl. . . . I'm glad to have had this talk with you; it's better than dodging each other and arousing suspicion. Aren't you going to shake hands? . . . O, well if you look at it in that light . . . just the same, I'm yours to command whenever you feel the need of me." . . . Exit doctor.

CHAPTER XII

TOWARD the end of the engagement in Chicago it became expedient that I undergo a minor operation. Will suggested I enter a private hospital near at hand, that he might be in daily communication with me. I preferred, however, to return to New York, and place myself under the care of our family physician. Our apartment being still occupied, I decided on one of the smaller hotels, which abound on the cross streets between Twenty-fourth and Forty-fifth. Will's company was booked for a week in Cleveland following the Chicago engagement.

I received daily letters from Will telling me how lonely he was without Boy and me, and every other day he wired me some nice little greeting. The operation was simple and, as Experience was permitted to bring Boy to visit me during given hours of the afternoon, the time passed quickly.

By the end of the week I was able to leave the hospital and I had apprised Will of my intention. Consequently I was not surprised to find a telegram awaiting me at the hotel. Experience said it had probably been delivered while she was on the way to fetch me. I waited until I had made myself comfy in a big arm chair which Experience had ready for me, and while she made a cup of tea over our alcohol lamp I settled back to enjoy Will's message. It was a long one, I saw at a glance. Experience turned enquiringly at my ejaculation. The telegram had been sent from Cincinnati, where Will was now playing, following Cleveland. It read: "Come at once if you are able to travel. Not ill, but need your presence. Have wired money to bank. Best train Big Four Limited leaving at six-thirty p. m. New York Central. Telegraph on departure. Love, Will."

I read and reread the message. My perturbation grew. What did Will mean by "need your presence"? He forestalled any alarm about his health by saying he was not ill, but had he told the truth? Perhaps he had met with an accident, a terrible disfiguring—surely I was letting my nerves run away with

me. . . . But why did he urge me to come to Cincinnati when we had planned to meet the following week in St. Louis, his home city, and where there was to be a kind of reunion of the family relatives? It was obvious that he expected me, as he had taken the care to look up trains and had telegraphed the money.

There was something very much the matter. . . . I glanced at the clock. It lacked a few minutes of five, and the train left at half after six. . . . The bank was closed, but I could get a check cashed. Whatever had happened it was my duty to be with Will. I jumped to my feet, forgetful of my convalescence. The weakness had vanished. I felt strangely well. "Experience . . . never mind the tea. . . . We leave for Cincinnati at once. . . ."

Experience set down the kettle and looked at me with her hand on her hips. . . . I made no explanation, but began to don the clothes I had only a moment since removed. The necessity for immediate action finally seeped into Experience's brain. "Then I guess I'll have to fly at packin' up. . . . Law-zee, if this ain't seein' the country! . . ."

Will met us at the station. The first glimpse of him through the iron grill relieved my sus-

pense concerning his health. He was not ill, and appeared to be whole and undamaged. He was solicitous about my condition. I *did* look a bit of a wreck. After the excitement of getting off had subsided and there was nothing to do but listen to the monotonous clickety-click of the speeding train, I had collapsed. The reaction was too great. It was not until we were in sight of our destination that I dragged myself to my feet and steeled myself to meet whatever emergency confronted me. . . . Naturally I asked no questions during the drive to the hotel. The general aspect of Cincinnati was typical of my state of mind: an unsunned sky and a smoke-filmed atmosphere. . . . It occurred to me how fallacious was Milton's conception of "evil news." . . . "For evil news rides post while good news baits." It has always appeared to me the other way about. Good news flashes on to its destination gathering impetus as it goes, while harbinger of bad lags on behind, retarding the very hours by its sable weight. . . . The mental rack of suspense, of waiting, while the imagination conjures an endless chain of dire probabilities. . . . When, at last, Experience and Boy were settled in an adjoining room Will closed the

door and turned to me. It seemed an interminable time before he spoke. He seemed to be bracing himself for the effort.

"First I want to thank you for coming without question. . . . I only hope you will not suffer a relapse. . . ."

I waved aside the preamble. . . .

"Well," I said. . . .

* * * *

I think I was stunned. Nothing seemed quite real about the room. Even Will's voice sounded remote. I had experienced the same sensation coming out of the ether after my operation. The doctor's assuring "It's all right, little lady; just open your eyes" reached me from across spanless space. Then, as now, followed a great wave of nausea, whirling me into a relentless undertow, leaving me limp and racked with pain. . . . Mechanically I re-read the clipping Will had thrust into my hand by way of preparing me for what followed. It was an excerpt from "The Club Window" and ran as follows: "A certain clique of rough-riders allied with a North Side country club are laying odds on a high-stepping filly of their set who for some time past has been riding for a fall. The inevitable cropper will involve a certain

actor who for the past month has been delighting Chicago audiences with his manly pulchritude as well as his histrionic ability. The lady in the case showed marked preference for the society of the actor during one of his former visits to the Windy City. From time to time there has reached the ears of the seat-warmers in the Club Window gossip of certain little junkets to New York during the past winter. It may have been purely coincidental that the actor was playing a season's engagement in the metropolis but—be that as it may—the advent of the company to our parts was watched with considerable gusto. Likewise it may have been purely chance that the husband of the third part was away on a hunting trip. 'The best laid plans of' and so forth; the unexpected happened when the actor's wife accompanied him on his visit to us. The affair was for the moment in abeyance. *But*—no sooner had the wife returned to New York than the fire broke out with renewed ardour probably fanned by the previous adverse winds of cruel fate. When the company left for another city the fair Chicagoan was missing from her accustomed haunts. Subsequent investigation affirmed the rumour that the lady was a guest at

a leading hotel in Cleveland. Incidentally her suite of rooms was on the same floor as that of the actor. Let us hope that some busy bee does not buzz about the head of the mighty hunter and bring him back gunning for the destroyer of his peace. Verily, verily, the actor hath power to charm."

"You must realize, girlie, that I wouldn't have worried you with this nasty business if I hadn't been afraid of letting us both in for something worse. . . . What do you think of the damned cat who cooked up a thing like that? It was pure spite work. You see it was like this: When I met this female reporter two years ago she was all for me. You remember the nice things she wrote about me when I played Chicago the last time? Well, she came on to New York last winter and I took her to lunch and showed her other little attentions just to keep on the good side of her. About the same time the other dame blew in, and I felt it was up to me to discharge some of my social debts to her. Here's where the elderly spinster reporter got sore. She thought she had a corner on the market. It's hell to be such a fascinatin' devil! . . ."

Will winked at me, albeit a little dubiously,

sensing a probable lack of appreciation on my part.

"When I came back to Chicago this trip," he continued, "I received a note from my quondam friend and later she came back to my dressing-room to see me. She made some pertinent remarks about the other woman, hinted at some persons being ingrates after all she had done to boom them when they were 'also rans' and, now that they had got there, threw down their old friends. I lost my temper a bit and we parted bad friends. The result was she transferred her booming to ——" (Will named the character actor of his company) "and proceeded to lay it over me on every possible occasion. . . . These damned women are always worse when they get along in life. . . ."

"What did this 'club' woman expect of you? . . . What did she want?"

Will looked at me blankly, then batted his eyes. . . .

"Why . . . why, I suppose the old hen wanted me to make love to her: she made a play for me and I threw her down hard."

He took the clipping from my fingers and replaced it in his wallet.

"Did you know that the—*the* lady was coming to Cleveland?" I asked.

"Why—not exactly; she said something about it while we were still in Chicago but I thought she was bluffing. As a matter of fact I thought she had more sense than to do a thing like that."

"What led you to believe she had better sense?—anything in her past performances?"

"No—but women are pretty foxy: they generally take care to cover their trails no matter how reckless they pretend to be. Not many of them want to lose their homes in spite of their protestations about giving up everything for 'thou'. . . ."

"Why did you not insist on her returning home at once? Couldn't you have gone to another hotel?"

"What good would that have done? She would have followed. When she turned up in Cleveland I handed it to her straight, you may imagine. I didn't mince matters a little bit."

"Was she afraid to go back home?"

"I don't know; she said she'd left for good and that she'd never live with her husband

again. I told her she could do as she pleased about *that,* but I didn't propose to become involved. Then she threatened to commit suicide—throw herself in the lake. I told her to go ahead and then she had hysterics all over the place. I had a fine tea-party, I can tell you. . . . Somebody sent me a marked copy of the Club Window. I knew, then, it wouldn't be long before her husband would get wise to it and I didn't know what kind of a game he'd spring on me. I guess it's not the first time the lady has kicked over the matrimonial traces, according to reports. Maybe he's looking for just such an opening."

The room was thick with tobacco-smoke. Will was burning up one cigar after another.

"She made a fine spectacle of herself and of me by showing up at the railway station looking like a boiled owl. After our scene she capped the climax by getting a peach of a jag. . . . By George, I never will hear the last of it from the members of the company." He pulled down a window from the top and stopped at the desk, where he took a telegram from his portfolio—a Christmas present I had made him.

"Yesterday morning I received this." I read the message:

"Call me long distance Friday noon sharp. Important. (Signed) DOC."

"It was decent of the Doc, wasn't it? Well, I got him on long distance and the first thing he asked me was whether the lady were with me. 'Well, not exactly *with* me, but I can't shake her,' I shouted back. 'You've got to,' the Doc went on, 'for your wife's sake you mustn't get landed with the goods.' The Doc is one of these 'from-Missouri' gentlemen and wouldn't believe I was innocent under oath. Just the same he's a good fellow. He told me he knew all about my predicament and that he'd taken time by the forelock and got hold of madame's sister, who was standing beside him while he talked. She had her grip with her, ready to start for Cincinnati at once. I told him to send her by the fastest express. The Doc said that madame's husband had returned to town unexpectedly—just as I had anticipated—and after a stay of twenty-four hours had again disappeared. No one at his office or at his home knew where he had gone. The sister said he had called her up and inquired where

his wife had gone and had rung off abruptly. Then the Doc quizzed the stenographer, who was an old chum of his, and she confided to him that the husband's secretary had bought a ticket to Cleveland. . . . 'He's on the trail,' the Doc warned, 'and there's only one thing for you to do . . . send for your wife if she's able to travel. . . . Make her get to Cincinnati before he does. Your wife is a level-headed little woman and if you put it to her straight she'll play up. . . . Together you can cook up something to placate the irate husband. . . .' Can't you just hear the old Doc roar? Well, I thought his advice good and I wired you at once."

. . . "Has the sister arrived?" . . . I found it difficult to make myself heard. My voice was dry and grated harshly. . . .

"Yes, she's here; they're on the floor below." Will poured a glass of water and handed it me. Then he sat on the edge of the bed and waited. It was his turn to be silent. He seemed to have talked himself out. . . .

"Which of them is it? . . . Do I know her?"

"Yes; we had dinner at her house one Sunday night."

"Blonde?"

"Um—yes. . . ."

"Art's triumph over Nature, I suppose." . . . I could not resist the thrust . . . suddenly I sat bolt upright.

"Will . . . *Will*. . . . Not—Mrs F.—not the woman with the two little girls . . . not the mother of those children. . . ."

He nodded and raised his shoulders with a gesture which was half deploring, half deprecating.

"O!!! . . ." I covered my face with my hands . . . the picture was *too* revolting. . . . "Children don't cut much ice," the doctor had said. I stopped up my ears to shut out his voice. . . .

"How did it begin?" I said at last.

"O . . . the usual way . . . supper—or dinner, I've forgotten which—a little flirtation, lots of booze, motor-rides, rendez-vous while you listen to the neglected wife song and dance, more dinners and suppers and motor-rides . . . and the first thing you know the fool woman is in love with you, or thinks she is, which is worse. . . . I hope you don't blame *me*. I can't help it if women make fools of themselves over me." . . . Something in Will's tone—a

sang froid—almost a *braggadocio*—sent the blood to my face with a rush of anger. I leaned forward in my chair and looked him in the eyes.

"Will . . . do you mean to tell me that you never encouraged this woman?"

"How do you mean—encouraged?"

"In God's name don't juggle with your words—don't equivocate! You know what I mean as well as I do!—to encourage in a hundred intangible ways; to show that you are flattered by a woman's attention; to let her believe that *you* believe you are the only one upon whom she has bestowed her favours; to let her tell you that you are the first man for whom she has betrayed her husband, though she has been neglected and unhappy for years and years; to cram down your throat the intimate confidences of her married life and to tell you she has never sought consolation elsewhere; to let her do all these without giving her the lie when you know in your heart she was lying. That's what I mean! . . . O, believe me I am beginning to understand the intricacies of the game . . . and if you have gone the limit . . . I don't ask you to confess it . . . fidelity does not hinge upon the sexual act, alone—though

you men place that above every other virtue in a woman—but I do ask you for the sake of your manhood, for your own self-respect, don't, *don't* play the part of a cad!"

Will winced as if I had struck him in the face. His face had grown quite pale and his lips were compressed. When he spoke his voice cut the air like a fine blade of steel.

"So that's what you think, is it? . . . I've obviously made a mistake in sending for you . . . but I did so more for your sake than for my own . . . to prepare you and save you from a shock if there was a blow-out. . . . I never knew before what a poor opinion you had of me."

"Don't distort my words, Will, if you please. . . ."

He paced back and forth, beating the back of one hand against the palm of the other.

"I know you're sick and weak . . . I'm trying to make every allowance for your state of nerves. Up to date you've played up like a brick. I've often watched you and secretly admired the way you handled things, but—if you're going to spoil it all by developing into a jealous woman at this stage of the game . . ." I turned on him quickly.

"I'm sure you can't say that I've ever annoyed you in that line."

"No, I'll admit, you've been a level-headed woman . . . but remember I've played square with you and I think you'll admit *that*. I've never had a serious affair with any woman—and the Lord knows I have it thrown at me from all sides. The woods are full of Potiphar's wives. . . . If you had some men to deal with . . . how many of 'em can stand up against that sort of thing without losing their heads? . . . why, I've had people tell me we were a model couple . . . and, here, the first time I get into anything like a serious predicament——"

"Then you admit other predicaments?"

"Why, of course, there's been . . . O, hell—what's the use of trying to argue with a woman! You're like all the rest!—when it comes to a show-down they're not deuces high!" . . . He crossed to the telephone and called a waiter.

"I've got to order an early dinner; I'll have a fine dose of indigestion as it is—after all this infernal row. . . . Of course, if it came to a show-down and he named me as co-respondent it wouldn't do *me* any damage but it would

upset the pater and the rest of the family all along the line. You know how they feel about the stage . . ."

"What about me?" was on the tip of my tongue but I did not voice it or the thoughts which followed. How should I feel to see a home broken up and to know that my husband shared in the wrecking?—whether directly or indirectly—the results were the same. And the woman—and the two little girls . . . what of them? . . . A knock at the door caused my very heart to contract. Had the husband arrived to demand Heaven only knew what? . . . The waiter entered with a menu. I had completely forgotten that Will had summoned him. When the waiter had taken the order and gone, Will crossed and laid his hand on my arm.

"Come now, girlie—we musn't let this fool thing come between you and me. It isn't worth it! You know I love you . . . you're the only woman I've ever loved . . . ever *will* love . . ."

O, wise husband! He knew I could no more resist his tenderness than a flower resists the warm sun. . . . He let me revel in my first fierce burst of tears and comforted me mutely;

then, still holding me in his arms, he went on talking:

"Sometimes I hate this damned business and feel that I'd like to chuck it altogether . . . but what's a man to do after he's given the best years of his life to one thing? It takes a long time to get established in any profession, nowadays . . . and I'm getting older every day. . . . I'm sorry I was ugly . . . *my* nerves are a bit frazzled, too . . . but I'll be all right, now that you and I understand each other . . . come, now . . . let's forget it. . . . Come in the bath-room and bathe your eyes. I've ordered a nice little dinner and a bottle of fizz; it'll buck you up. Then, before I go to the performance, we'll outline some plan of action. . . ."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked, as I came out of the bath-room a little later.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN I entered the room I had no intention of engaging in a slanging match. I had telephoned my coming and her sister was awaiting me. I felt almost sorry for the girl standing beside the bed, her eyes meeting mine uncertainly, her lips forcing a greeting.

"Won't you sit down? Fannie, here is Mrs. Hartley. . . ."

The woman in the bed turned and raised herself on her elbow. Her face was swollen, the lips blue and loose, and her eyes had the look of watery gelatine. Without meeting my eyes, she moaned theatrically and buried her face in the pillows.

"What—*what* must you think of me?" she whined.

"I think you're a fool!" slipped out before I could prevent it.

"All women are fools—we're all fools over some man," she exclaimed, pounding the pillows with her fist and working herself up to a Zazaesque brand of hysteria.

"Mrs. F., I did not come here to listen to a dissertation on the sex-question nor to hold your hand while you have a fit of nerves. You've got to pull yourself together or I'll wash my hands of the whole affair. I've come all the way from New York to help you out of a nasty, a *dirty* scrape. If you wish to hear what I have to say you'll stop that silliness and act like a full-grown woman with a modicum of discretion. . . . Your husband is apt to walk in at any moment and it may be well for all concerned that we arrive at some plan of defence."

Her sister, who had retired to a corner of the room behind me when I sat down, now crossed to the bedside.

"Mrs. Hartley is right, Fannie—Frank is liable to show up at any minute."

Fannie fished for her handkerchief under the pillows and sniffed tearfully while her sister arranged the pillows.

"Please pardon me, Mrs. Hartley; my nerves are all gone."

"I have a few nerves, myself," I thought. I found myself grasping the arms of my chair as one sometimes does at the dentist's and my teeth fairly ached from the clinching of my

jaws. When Mrs. F. had folded and dropped her hands into her lap with the air of a long-suffering woman, I proceeded.

"Mr. Hartley and I have decided that you are my guest: that it was at my invitation you went to Cleveland with us and that I urged you to continue on the trip until your husband returned from his hunting trip. On your arrival here, you contracted a heavy cold which developed into the grippe; grippe will answer as well as anything else and is not sufficiently serious to call in a physician. Are you familiar with the symptoms of the grippe?" Mrs. F. nodded.

"Very well. When you began to grow worse you telegraphed your sister."

"But," interjected the sister, "that won't do; that won't hold together because Frank called me up on the telephone a few moments after he returned to Chicago and I told him I didn't know where Fannie was. . . ." I stopped to think. . . .

"Then we'll have to make the telegram reach you immediately *after* he telephoned and, as he disappeared so abruptly without telling even his office force where he was going, you have an explanation for not being able to reach

him. . . . Now, about the Cleveland week: you didn't know that your sister had gone away because you yourself were out of town. I believe that really was the case, was it not?"

"Quite true," replied the sister. "I was spending a few days at Wheaton."

"Then so far, it is clear, is it not? . . . Mr. Hartley will take care of the article which appeared in the Club Window . . . and if your husband arrives, I'll try to take care of him. . . . Now, . . . let us think: are there any points we have overlooked?" There was a silence while each of us reviewed the situation. It was Mrs. F. who spoke first.

"Suppose—suppose Frank has set detectives on my track and they find out that you've not been to Cleveland! O, I'm sure he'll do it! It's just like Frank! You don't know what a brute he can be. O, it's all very well to say that I am to blame—that I am in the wrong, but if you had lived with Frank for eight years as I have you'd understand some things—and not treat me as if I was a——"

"Stop that!" I felt my eyes snap with the blaze she had kindled. She snivelled and sobbed a bit, then relaxed into sullen silence.

"If your husband *has* employed detectives

we'll have to meet the contingency by standing together. In other words we'll perjure ourselves like—perfect ladies. Mr. Hartley says—and being a man he ought to know—that no man would have the courage to tell me I was not telling the truth, even if he thought so."

"We'll never get away with it—we'll never get away with it," wailed Mrs. F.

It was the sister who spoke next.

"And suppose Frank does not show up—suppose he doesn't come at all but waits for the detectives' report and——"

"And begins action for divorce without even saying a word about it!" It was Madame who interjected this possibility. "Wouldn't that be just like him! Wouldn't that be Frank just down to the ground? Edith knows how cold-blooded he is, don't you, Edith? O, it's too awful! I never could live through such a thing! I wouldn't live! I'd kill myself—I'd throw myself into the lake! I'd——"

"Don't you think you are wearing that threat a little threadbare?" I asked quietly, henceforth addressing myself to the sister.

"In the event that your brother-in-law does

not come or that we hear nothing from him, there is only one thing left: you must take your sister back to Chicago . . . and I'll go with you. . . ."

I believe my voice petered out before I completed the sentence. The idea was repugnant, but was it not all revolting in the extreme? I had given my promise to Will to "see it through" and I intended to do so to the best of my ability. Mrs. F.'s sister broke my train of thought. She stood before me with averted eyes struggling to keep back the tears, and twisting her hands nervously.

"Mrs. Hartley . . . I don't want to appear maudlin . . . but I think . . . you understand how I feel. . . . It seems almost inane to say . . . how much we . . . appreciate what you are doing. . . . For my sister's sake I thank you. . . . I . . ."

"I'm not doing it for your sister's sake"—I tried to speak gently but everything in me seemed to have grown hard and unyielding—"nor for my husband's sake; neither for my own; I've got a boy—a son . . . and there are two little girls. . . ."

A volley of sobs smote our ears and shook the bed.

"My poor babies! The poor darlings! . . . I wish they had never been born!" . . .

"It's too bad you didn't think of them before, Fannie," her sister answered caustically. It was the first expression of censure she had voiced. Mrs. F. bounced to a sitting position: yes, *bounced* is the only adequate description. Grief had made a quick shift to anger. She glared at her sister.

"So you've turned against me, too, have you? I might have expected it: that's the gratitude you feel for all I've done for you. Where would you be if it were not for me?—you'd be pounding somebody's typewriter for five dollars a week! This is the thanks I get for sacrificing myself for the whole family! Every one of them will blame me for the whole business. What right have you to judge? How does anybody know what I've suffered for years living with that man? . . . literally starving for affection, . . . he never took the trouble to understand my temperament . . . he neglected me, he——"

"Hah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-" . . . It was my turn to indulge in hysteria, only mine was of the laughing variety: I laughed until the tears came—until I sank back from sheer exhaustion.

From their expression Madame and her sister thought I had gone suddenly mad.

"What are you laughing at?" she snapped, glaring at me with suppressed rage.

"My dear," I responded feebly, "my dear, don't you realize what an awful old chestnut that neglected wife story is? Mr. Hartley says they all use it . . . it is the cardinal excuse, the subterfuge all married women resort to, to justify their own infidelities."

"Did—did Mr. Hartley intimate——?"

"O, no! Mr. Hartley betrayed none of your confidences . . . but, tell me honestly . . ." —I leaned forward and clasped my knees to better accentuate my words—"do you really expect a man of the world to believe that—or care whether you are neglected or not? You know that men gossip and bandy women's names about their clubs—not in so many damning words, but with a knowing wink, a shrug of the shoulder, this head-shake, or, 'by pronouncing some doubtful phrase . . . or such ambiguous giving out' . . . my dear . . . I have a rare collection of mash-notes which my actor-husband has from time to time tossed laughingly into my lap. Their character varies like the colour of the paper on which they are

written. There is the white, the pale blue, and several shades of lavender. . . . The actor's world is full of lavender ladies of the Bovary type: the wonder of it is that so many of them 'get away with it' as you have so elegantly expressed it. Suppose *you* don't get away with it . . . suppose your husband divorces you . . . what will become of you? How will you live? You're not equipped to make your own living. You couldn't even typewrite—like your sister. Suppose I were to divorce my husband, naming you as co-respondent: do you flatter yourself he would marry you? And let us assume that he did: How long do you think it would last? He is a poor man. His profession is a purely speculative one. His income is assured for only two weeks at a time, except in rare instances. He couldn't give you the jewels, the furs, the motors and the luxuries you now enjoy. How long do you believe your mad passion would endure, stripped of little appurtenances like wine suppers and suites of rooms in the best hotels? . . . Perhaps you'd become an actress like so many women who look on the stage as an open sesame to a life of immorality. . . . Like so many women with a screw loose in their moral machinery . . . no,

don't you say a word! This is my scene—and I am going to hold the centre of the stage for once in my career! . . . I know your kind, milady. . . . You belong to that great class of over-fed and under-bred women who make life so hard for the rest of their sex. You're one of the wasters; you waste what does not rightfully belong to you; what you usurp in your greediness, in your pandering to your vanities, in your compromise with your better instincts, in your connivance with the very devil who finds some mischief still for idle hands to do! You stimulate your passions with alcohol and mistake the fumes for love! You haven't the courage to come out and be a genuine prostitute, but you ply the trade in the rôle of an adulteress. For God's sake, wake up! Look yourself in the eyes before it is too late! If you have no self-respect, no respect for your sex, try at least to respect the rights of those little souls you've brought into the world without their asking. O, yes, cry! . . . Crocodile tears and alcoholic drool! . . . It's a mistake to believe that all women have the maternal instinct . . . so have female cats and dogs—and rabbits." . . .

I had risen as my fury sought to master me.

I stood beside the bed looking down at her . . . making an ineffectual last-ditch fight for my self-control. Something about the woman . . . the very quality of her night-dress—the heavily jewelled fingers—maddened me. The poison coursed through my veins like quicksilver . . . once before in my life I had felt it . . . before my boy was born . . . *then* I had succumbed to a desire to wreak physical vengeance . . . the same madness seized me now . . . I saw her shrink from me. . . .

"O, you—*you*——!"

. . I didn't say it; I caught myself in time. The blood stained my face with shame—shame with the very coarseness of the thought; shame with the whole revolting situation. Was I, too, become impregnated with the corroding influence of my environment? I turned and walked toward the door. As I reached for the knob, it opened and some one entered abruptly. I jumped aside to avoid being struck.

I knew who he was though I had never seen him before. The next moment I had reached for his hand and grasped it impulsively, at the same time laying a warning finger on my lips and indicating the bed.

"O, Mr. F., you don't know how glad I am

to see you. We've been worried to death . . . she's asleep now, after the most racking night . . . do you mind not waking her for the present? . . . of course if you'd rather . . ." I waited while he looked at the figure of his wife, lying helpless with her face to the wall, while his eyes roved to question those of the sister, then back to mine with the single word:

"Sick? . . . How long has she been sick?"

"Ever since we arrived here; it's the grippe, I think, though we couldn't induce her to see a doctor. She's been so upset at not hearing from you. . . . Do you mind stepping into the hall where we can talk more freely without danger of disturbing her? . . . Edith will call us if she awakens, won't you, Edith?" . . .

* * * * * *

Edith did not call. The hall was draughty; I managed a sneeze. Mr. F. suggested that we go down to the grill and have a drink. In the elevator I saw him glance furtively at me. . . . I was humming softly to myself. I watched his eyes in the mirror; they had a confused look not unmixed with suspicion. Not until after the second cocktail did he thaw a bit. He asked me whether I had dined. I told him I had not. After he had ordered, he

leaned back in his chair and gave me a penetrating look. I met his eyes and smiled a little.

"You look tired," I said.

"I am—rather. These sleeper jumps take it out of a fellow."

"They surely do . . . and I presume you've been worried to death about Fannie." The name slipped glibly from my lips. He shot me a quick glance which told me the familiar use of his wife's name had been effective. He shifted uneasily in his seat as he answered.

"Well, yes——"

"We have been fairly living on the long distance telephone trying to reach you. What on earth was the trouble? Edith received Fannie's telegram a minute after you called her up and when she tried to reach you—well, she couldn't, that's all. . . ."

"There was something the matter with the connection . . . it's been off for several days . . ." he replied.

"Of course we could have telegraphed but we didn't want to alarm you," I went on, meeting his own brave lie with another. "As a matter of fact I think we all were more scared than hurt. Fannie had had a cold while we were

still in Chicago—that's a trying climate in the winter. Then when we reached Cleveland, there wasn't much of an improvement in the matter of weather and I felt a bit guilty in having urged her to go with us." I toyed with the celery and wiped off imaginary soot.

"Were you in Cleveland?"

I looked up at him in mild surprise.

"Why, of course. It was at my invitation that Fannie accompanied us. She was bored to death in Chicago . . . it must be deadly monotonous—this same routine day after day . . . the same faces and nothing new to talk about. . . . You know—you know if you were my husband I shouldn't let you run away on hunting trips and leave me behind. . . . I don't think you men realize how stupid it becomes with no change of menu — as it were. . . ."

I reproved him with a smile. For the first time his eyes sent back a glint of warmth.

"How long have you known Fannie? It's odd that I've never—had the pleasure of meeting you before." (The pleasure was an afterthought.)

"O . . . I've known Fannie for . . . let me see . . . nearly three years. . . ." (I made

a mental note of this for "Fannie's" benefit.) "We met when Will played Chicago two seasons since. We took quite a fancy to each other, and last winter when she came to New York we went about together and became quite good friends. . . . I presume you were away on one of your hunting trips last winter . . . naughty sir . . . that's the reason I didn't meet you. . . . This trip I brought Boy to Chicago. . . . You haven't seen my young son, have you? You must make his acquaintance tomorrow. We're most awfully vain about him . . . think he's the only boy in the world. I suppose you feel that way about your little girls . . . they *are* beauties. They've got your eyes, though they have inherited Fannie's regular features. . . ."

Would my tongue never stop wagging? What manner of woman had I suddenly become? I did not recognize myself. Was it a case of self-hypnosis and was I really feeling the interest and friendliness I pretended? He was not precisely an Adonis; there was something rough, almost uncouth, about him in spite of the veneer his money had brought. But there was a kindliness, a wholesouledness that made itself felt. Under any other conditions I

should have liked him. . . . I saw him look at his watch.

"What time is it? . . . The performance will soon be over and Mr. Hartley will wonder where I am. . . . Wouldn't he be surprised to walk in here and see me dining with a strange man? . . . I hope you're not afraid of getting yourself talked about. . . ."

"No, I guess not," he laughed back. I was silent for a time, while I wrestled with the breast of a squab. I felt his eyes upon me. When I looked at him I saw that he was revolving something in his mind, and I sensed the subject. I gave him time to think it over. After a while I leaned back in my chair.

"I'm sorry to confess it, but I'm beginning to feel a bit tired," I sighed. "Even your genial presence will not keep my eyes open much longer. . . . Edith I'm sure is feeling the strain, too. Well, we'll all sleep better tonight—after our worry. 'All's well that ends well'—and that reminds me—my husband and I were admiring a set of Shakespeare you have in your library."

"Um—yes; I remember it. I bought it for the binding. Don't believe I ever saw the in-

side of it. . . ." He freshened my glass of wine.

"You're not much of a drinker, are you?"

"Haven't got brains enough to stand it," I answered flippantly.

He laughed; it had a true ring to it.

The game was in my hands.

"I guess you mean you've got brains enough to *with*stand it."

Would the dinner never come to an end? I thought. My body seemed to grow old with the minutes. At last the waiter cleared the table. When he had gone for a liqueur, Mr. F. took some letters from his pocket. From the packet he selected a piece of printed matter. He laid it face down upon the table while he replaced the letters. Then he looked at me, drumming with his fingers over the spot where the clipping lay. The waiter returned. Mr. F. drained the cognac glass and called for another. While it was being brought he folded his arms upon the table and leaned toward me.

"I wonder whether I'd better show you something. . . ."

I assumed the same attitude; it was conducive to confidence.

"Show me what?"

His drumming became louder.

"No, I guess I won't!" . . .

"Now, I call that unkind—to pique my curiosity and leave me suspended in mid-air."

He folded the clipping and rattled it between his fingers.

"Is that what you were going to show me? Wait a moment." . . . I leaned toward him to better examine the paper, then relaxed against the back of the chair and smiled.

"I think I know what it is. . . . Will you lay me a wager? What will you wager that I can guess what that paper is the very first time?"

He sprawled and tilted back his chair good-naturedly.

"O, I'll bet you a box of candy or a bunch of violets."

"A five-pound box of candy—I don't like violets. Agreed?"

He nodded.

"It's a clipping from the Club Window. . . ."

"Then you've seen it?"

"Of course I've seen it, silly man—hasn't everybody seen it? And wasn't my Willy furiously angry? He wanted to take the first train

back to Chicago and clear out the whole establishment. It was all Fannie and I could do to calm him. . . . He said he was going to see you about it because he thought you and he should get together and take some kind of action against the slanderous sheet. I tell him he's foolish to pay any attention to it; just let it die of inanition. Don't you think so?"

"Well, I was a little upset myself when I read it. I didn't know what the devil to think. . . ."

"Well, I know you've got too much sense to believe anything wrong about your wife. . . . I can appreciate how you and Will feel about it and that you'd like to make them retract—but —isn't it best to ignore it?—so long as *we* know it's a malicious lie. . . . It's a shocking thing the way the press in this country construes license for freedom. . . . The libel laws are wholly inadequate. They manage that sort of thing much better in England. . . . There are so many evil-minded people in the world—don't you find it so?"

"Well, I confess, there's always somebody hanging around anxious to disseminate gossip, though I've never observed any of them helping along the nice things you hear."

"Now that we are on the subject, I'll tell you how this happened; the woman who concocted that libellous attack is an ugly perverted creature—she must be perverted or she would not be earning her livelihood in such a questionable way, don't you think so? Several years ago when she met my husband she volunteered to write some nice little personalia about him. He wasn't as well known then as now and every little bit helps, you know. . . . Well, Will kept up a desultory acquaintance with the woman and saw her from time to time. She was in New York when Fannie was there last winter, by the way. I don't know just how it came about, but the spinster scribbler developed a jealous streak and upbraided Will for being ungrateful for all she had done for him. I'm sure she could not have done a great deal for anyone in a wretched paper like the Club Window. To tell you the truth she was infatuated with Will. To use his own words—she made a play for him and he threw her down hard! Mr. Hartley is not given to that sort of thing—and if he were—you may be sure I should have something to say about it." I nodded sententiously.

"Yes, I guess you'd make it pretty warm

for any poacher on your preserves!" We both laughed. I believe I even jerked my head pertly to mark my cocksureness. And, as I turned away, my eyes settled upon Will. He was standing in the doorway, evidently having just entered, since he still wore his overcoat and carried his hat in his hand. I half-rose. My host followed my move.

"It's Will—it's Mr. Hartley . . . come in, Will. . . ." I beckoned to him and stole a glance at Mr. F. No, there was no hesitation on his part. He rose and crossed to meet Will with outstretched hand. My hand shook so that I could hardly raise the wine glass to my lips. I drained the last drop and sank into my chair. The game was won. . . .

* * * * * *

It was nearly an hour later when I rose to leave the table. Will had eaten the supper which Mr. F. had insisted upon ordering and they were still calling for wine. I had steered the conversation clear of the perilous rocks and felt that I could now safely leave the two men together. They rose with me.

"I'm sorry to leave such delightful company —I believe I said something like that an hour ago, did I not, Mr. F.? . . . I want to drop

in on Edith and make my peace with her. I fear she'll feel neglected. If you require my services during the night please don't hesitate to ring me up, though I feel sure Fannie will be ever so much better now that you've arrived. I presume you two gentlemen want to talk things over—that wretched slander, I mean—only—" and at this point I assumed a mock-serious attitude—"don't do anything until you hear from me, will you? . . . Now, please don't move. . . . I'll find my way. . . . Good-night, sir . . . and don't forget that you owe me five pounds of the best candy in Cincinnati."

When I reached Mrs. F.'s room, her sister had already opened the door. She had heard the elevator stop and was waiting. The girl's face was drawn and the circles under the eyes had deepened. Mrs. F., too, showed the strain of waiting.

"Mr. F. and my husband are downstairs; they were exchanging funny stories when I left . . . there will be no pistols—nor a divorce on this count . . . now, if you have another spell of hysterics I think I shall kill you. . . . Edith . . . we had better begin calling each other 'dearie' and that sort of thing to accustom ourselves, for we've known each other three years

. . . please repeat it after me so that you won't forget it. . . . Edith, should you mind pouring me a dose of Fannie's valerian? . . . I think I took a wee drop too much . . . my teeth are fairly chattering . . . now let me think. . . . I'll begin at the moment we left the room together . . . please don't interrupt unless there is something you do not grasp . . . he may come at any moment. . . ."

* * * * * *

I went to the telephone directly I entered my room and called for the room clerk. I told him I wanted another room on the same floor. While I waited for the bell-boy to bring the key I wrote a note and pinned it on the mirror where it would attract Will's attention. "I have gone to another room. Don't disturb me, please. We'll talk it over tomorrow."

When I had turned the key in the lock and had surveyed my own domain I felt strangely light in the head. I opened a window and mechanically arranged my toilet articles. Then I disrobed, unpinned my hair and cleansed my face with cold cream. At least, I *assume* that I did all these, for the next day, when I awoke to consciousness, everything was in place, my hair was braided in two pig-tails, and my face

still showed traces of cold cream. From the moment I had locked myself in I had no recollection of what followed. The doctor called it "syncope."

CHAPTER XIV

"St. Louis, Mo., March 10th.

"Darling Girl:

"I am taking for granted that you arrived safely. There has been no word from you since you returned home a week since. I hope you found the apartment in good shape and that things did not suffer too much wear and tear at the hands of our late tenants.

"Just as I predicted, the folks were much disappointed at not seeing you here. There was a regular family reunion. Grandma Murray came on from Indianapolis and two of my paternal aunts all the way from Kansas. As none of the relatives has ever seen Boy you may imagine how disappointed they were. However, it couldn't be helped. Naturally I did not tell them that you had been to Cincinnati. I let them infer that you were not sufficiently recovered from the effects of your recent operation to permit your making the trip. I fully appreciate the state of your nerves and that a relapse was inevitable; just the same I think you should write me and keep me informed of your condition. Take it quietly for a few weeks and you'll come out all right. Don't let that Cincinnati affair prey on your mind: a little later when your health is better, you won't take it so se-

riously. Now don't jump at the conclusion that I don't appreciate the way you played up, or the narrow escape I have had. You may feel sure that sort of thing will never happen again. And that reminds me: I had a letter from Mr. F. saying he had consulted his lawyer about taking action against the Club Window and had been advised to let the matter drop. (*Requiescat in pace!*) He wished to be remembered to you.

"The weather is depressing. I'm not feeling up to my standard. I suspect I have been eating too much and exercising too little. Well, Girlie, the train leaves in an hour and I have still some odds and ends to look after. I enclose our route to follow Kansas City. Now write me at once or I shall begin to worry about you. A bunch of kisses to Boy from his Dad, reserving all you want for yourself, of course.

"With all my love,

"Your devoted husband,

"WILL."

THIS letter was a week old. I had made several attempts to answer it but all had ended in the waste-basket. Following my home-coming, I had been glad to lie quietly in bed in obedience to the doctor's orders. A heavy inertia lay upon me. My nights were an amorphous jumble of improbable situations; I awoke of mornings with a nausea at heart. My mind was furred with unpleasant memories. It re-

volved in circles. The more I thought the faster it whirled, resulting in complete confusion. Inner adjustment seemed impossible. I realized in a hazy way that I must arouse myself or fall a prey to melancholia. Even Boy's laughter as it was wafted to me from another room unleashed a thousand apprehensions. The effulgence his being had shed into my life was now dimmed by fears for his future. Should I be able to steer his craft, even launch it safely, *preparedly* on the turbulent sea of life? It was, probably, in the very nature of things that I should exclude my husband from any participation in my plans for the child. A fierce, almost a defiant, sense of proprietary right began to assert itself in relation to our son. The inertia gave way to a state of turbulence, which burned like a consuming fever. To Will's numerous letters and enquiries I at last responded by telegraph, "All well," I said.

One day there came a bulky envelope addressed in Will's handwriting. It enclosed a letter from John Gailbraith, the sculptor, who was still in Paris. Across the top Will had written: "This will interest you." Under separate cover came a package of photographs,

reproductions of the colossal work he had recently completed for the Spring Exhibition at the Salon.

"I have great hopes for this," he wrote. "(Hope is always promise-crammed, isn't it?) You will see that I have called it 'Super-Creation.' It was conceived like a lightning flash but the working out, the compelling cold, hard stone to express clearly what I intended to convey is the result of a dogged grind of nearly three years' incessant toil. Have I succeeded, do you think? Of course you have not seen the original, but the photographs are excellent work, having been taken at various angles and positions and under my supervision. You will observe that the work is—well, nothing short of monumental will express it. And, unless a government or an institution is moved to buy it, I shall probably have to build a house around it! However, I'm not discouraged though I've gone in debt for years to come and mortgaged almost my soul in order to get the wherewithal to complete the work. I suppose this is what you call 'the artistic temperament.' But I simply had to do it—I had to get it out of my system and in doing so I feel that I have lived up to the best that was in me. After all there is some consolation in the thought that one *has* lived up to one's best instincts. How goes your own work? And your missus? Ask her to write me and tell me without circumlocution what she thinks of my effort, especially the conception on the whole. I should like to have discussed

it with her and to have had her opinion in the making. Over here one gets only the one-sided opinion of one's confrères or the unimaginative view-point of a few moneyed Americans who want names (*BIG TYPE*) to fill up the bare wall-spaces. . . . I should like to ask your wife whether she is pursuing her work in earnest or whether like so many lady *dilettantes* she is only amusing herself. . . . How I should like to see you both here this coming summer! Is it not possible? I'll turn over my ménage to you if that is an inducement. Let me hear from you soon and send me the latest picture of the son and heir.

"Yours fraternally,

"J. G."

I had thrilled at the mere suggestion of a trip abroad but relegated the thought to a background of remote probabilities and gave myself up to an eager contemplation of the photographic reproductions of the sculptor's work. Following the numbers indicated on the back of each, I arranged the photographs consecutively across the wall.

The form appeared to be a kind of spiral, each step or incline complete in itself yet suggesting a connecting thread. At first glance I was struck with the multiplicity of figures, all nearly life size. But as my eagerness gave way to soberer perspective, something I had over-

looked now asserted itself: *In the score of characters represented there were but two faces—that of one man and one woman!* That is to say, the two faces were reproduced . . . yet . . . or did one's fancy play at tricks? . . . I applied the magnifying glass. . . . Yes, there were but two faces, both repeatedly used by the artist, but with what wondrous and illuminating difference! Starting from the left and lowest plane—symbolic of the theme—there was embodied in the figures of the man and maid the lowest form of love. . . . The youthful prettiness of the girl, the soft roundness of her form, the maiden breast . . . all these but accentuated the undeveloped soul. Her very attitude, the abandon as she lay smiling, half-hid amongst the leaves and blooms . . . here, indeed, was "a parley to provocation." . . . Above her towered the figure of a man. In his spare, sinewy form, conscient of its strength, vibrant with sex, the young male was epitomized. . . . "Instinct" need not be carved across the base. . . . Instinct, the first and lowest form of love.

From the grassy knoll the path ascended to a rocky promontory, bleak, arid. Straining 'gainst the fury of the storm, the man and

woman climbed; his muscles tense, confusion limned upon his face; the woman, crouching in her fright, hiding her face in her wind-tossed hair; while underfoot they trampled on a mask, the leering mask of former self . . . and, riding on the wind, half cloud, half god, a phantom with veiled face laid on the lash. . . . Confusion. . . . Chaos. . . .

The path led on and up through thorny underbrush; a parched earth; the cactus plant; some blanched bones, a horned toad. He stood apart with sullen mien; his features thick and brutalized; his muscles lax and loose, as if impotent rage had yielded to dumb apathy. The woman, lying prone, distorted with revolt and fright, seeking to shut out from view the hideous deformity at her breast—half man, half beast; its clenched fists, contorted legs raised to rebel; the grotesque mask miming its own despair. And in the background, poised on abyss-edge, a Hecate band whirled in orgy-dance. . . . Where is the tutelary goddess now—the Better Self, the Soul of Things? And even as I asked I followed in the path which, still inclining, reached a broad plateau. In the foreground, the man—gaunt and grim—the grimness of despair; his muscles knotted, his horny

hands, the poised axe. Through the matted woods a skulking wolf. . . . Beyond, the woman; haggard of face, drawn with fatigue; no longer full and round of form. Dropping seeds on fresh-tilled earth; a living burden on her back; around her neck two chubby arms. And at the entrance to the cave, half blended with the rocks, the Inscrutable One stood guard. . . . "The Will to Live" was written here. . . .

The path winds on, steeper, more tortuous still; by cliffs, abyss, *impasse,* bald peaks, the Mount is reached . . . and here they rest. . . . Like complements they stand, hand clasping hand, looking out and beyond; serene of brow, though scarred with age. An august peace, the harvest yield. A straight firm youth hangs on his mother's arm . . . and in that life is blent the best of both—the purpose of the race. The mantle of the clouds half moulds a form; the hands reach forth to stroke their eyes. . . . It is *the awakening.* . . .

CHAPTER XV

When Experience came in some time later, bringing a cup of chicken broth, she found me at my writing desk. Commenting on my flushed cheeks, she urged me back to bed. But a feverish energy had seized upon me: to work, to accomplish, to be independent of another's maintenance. There was a prescience that in the not far distant future I should have need of such resource, materially and spiritually. I shook off the foreboding as a connotation of my physical condition. To take my place in the world's work was the grandiose euphemism with which I lulled my uneasiness. That same night I unearthed my working kit from the closet in which it had been stored. One of the rooms of our apartment bearing the honorary title of "boudoir" had a southern exposure, and, as we were on the first floor nearest heaven, the light was good even on gloomy days, which abounded at this season of the year. I shall never forget the sense of exhilaration

with which I cleared the decks for action. It was as if some great force had breathed the vital impetus into my nostrils. When I had donned my brown overall-apron I paused and inhaled, deep and long. It was the first free breath I had drawn for weeks.

In reviewing the busts I had made of Boy while he was still a baby I was struck with the child's likeness to his father. Even Experience commented on it. I set to modelling other heads. Inspired by the example of our sculptor friend I essayed studies in expression. Boy, in a laughing mood; Boy, crying; sulking, in a temper; Boy asleep, his head pillowed on Snyder—Snyder, now so altered and disfigured by painless surgery at the hands of Experience as to be hardly recognizable. From the face and head I turned to a study of the hands. It had always appeared to me that there was more of the real character written in the human hand than in any other feature of the human form. I studied, absorbingly, the expression the artist had portrayed in the hands of the Inscrutable One as they emerged from the cloud-like drapery in the final grouping on the Mount. Strength, firmness, a certain largeness and benignity and withal a caressing tenderness. . . .

It pleased and surprised me to observe, how, with each new effort, the clay responded more readily to my touch. Sometimes I made experiments with modelling wax; a pinch here, a pressure there and the whole expression changed.

When my touch had mastered a certain sureness and deftness I planned a nude of Boy with the idea of later executing it in marble. I worked unceasingly; a relentless energy urged me on—to what purpose it never suggested itself to enquire. In my ardour I hardly paused to eat. But, conception is one thing; execution another. I began to understand the "dogged grind" the sculptor had spoken of. A kind of despair flagged my spirit. At such times I dragged myself out of doors. Sometimes Boy would accompany me on these walks, but for the greater part I went alone. I liked the overcast, drizzly days best. There was a quiet, a solace, in the unfrequented paths and woodsy corners of the upper boundaries of the Park. I spent hours sitting upon the rocks feeding the friendly squirrels, or tramping in the leaf-mouldy tangle. And by degrees my spirit yielded to the balm of solitude. Once again life fell into a groove. I told myself I had reached

a readjustment of my life. For Boy's sake, if for no other, my husband and I should go on together. The fact that I still loved my husband I placed as a parenthetic consideration, in my plans. Boy was the capstone of our married life. Having brought him into the world without the desire or power of selection on his part, obviously our first duty was to the child. "Honour thy father and thy mother" had always appeared to me in dire need of amendment. Why honour parents who are not qualified to command either respect or affection? "Be fruitful and multiply": whether saint or sinner, breed! breed! breed! Paugh! When will a Wise Prophet arise to reveal a doctrine of eugenics?—to preach that *quality, not quantity,* makes for the betterment of a race—that to be well born is the rightful heritage of the unborn. . . .

With the resolution to write my husband out of the fullness of my convictions I hurried homeward. The wind had shifted, and sharp bits of sleet cut against my face. Hearing me come in, Experience had brought me a cup of tea. I smiled at the ginger-bread dogs—all replicas of Snyder—which she told me she had made with the hope of amusing Boy. He

had been querulous and quite unlike his happy self; she feared he was not well, though at this moment he was sleeping quietly. I tip-toed into his room and, discerning no unnatural symptoms, I left him undisturbed.

The letter written, I gave myself up to the quiet hour: it was dusk, and with night a soothing hush seemed to pervade the activities of man. In the shadows of the room the whiteness of the plaster casts gleamed like tombstones, the lonely sentinels of the dead. I recall I shuddered at the thought and forthwith switched on the light. Once in every little while I looked in upon my Boy. When at last he opened his eyes and smiled at me, I hugged him to my breast with such vehemence as to make him cry out. His bedtime bath had always been the signal for a romp. Tonight, however, he seemed disinclined to play. A hot dryness of his skin caused me to take his temperature. I found nothing disquieting in the slight rise, and in response to his mood I lay down beside him to wait for the sand-man. All night he tossed. In the morning the temperature had risen to an alarming degree. I sent for the doctor. He came twice during the day. In the night Boy was seized with a convulsion.

When the doctor arrived in answer to a summons by telephone, he looked grave. Something clutched about my heart. It was with almost superhuman effort I framed the words. . . . "Shall I . . . send for his father? . . ." The doctor nodded. "How long with it take him to get here?" he said. . . .

CHAPTER XVI

In a driving rain, under a weeping sky, we followed the little white casket to the grave—the three of us. There, in the presence of only the mole-faced grave-diggers and the man of professional black, we yielded him up. Experience had asked, with a kind of awe, whether she should call in a minister. I could have shrieked at the mere suggestion! A minister? On what pretence? To mumble platitudinous euphemisms, worn thread-bare from usage—to essay to comfort me with specious consolation ground out like a gramophone: "Be brave, my child! He has gone to a better world," or "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away," or, again, "You are not alone in your affliction; other mothers have suffered their dear ones to be removed," et cetera, et cetera. Words! Words! Words! . . .

As they lowered him in the grave, his father held me close and, in a voice tremulous with tears, he quoted reverently: "And from his

fair and unpolluted flesh may violets spring." . . . And when the earth thud harshly 'gainst the coffin lid, closing him away forever . . . never again to hold him in my arms—never again to feel his cheek on mine. . . . O, Death! your sting lies buried in the hearts of those who stay behind . . . and then to leave him there . . . alone . . . in the heavy silence of the dead . . . so cold . . . all unresisting, his roguish laughter hushed . . . his lips, once red, now blue and drawn . . . the wax-like lids shadowed with heavy fringe . . . my Boy . . . my Boy . . . whose coming we had deplored, whose little life had so entwined itself about my heart as made a part of me—the better part. . . . Well . . . he had not tarried long. . . . Boy . . . *Boy*. . . .

In the overwhelming grief which had come to me, life appeared a void; a vacuous, heavy-footed thing, with moments of suspended thought, a merciful numbness of despair, a sound, a familiar sight, a rush of memory, a freshet of tears, each overlapped the other, so fast they followed. One of the unpardonable and most resented slights to those in affliction is the even tenor with which the world wags on its way, callous and indifferent. One

would have it stop, take heed, upheave. . . . So, when Will announced that it were expedient to rejoin his company almost immediately I felt a sacrilege was about to be committed. His rôle was being played by an understudy, who, after the manner of understudies, was neither prepared nor equal to the emergency which had suddenly confronted him. Will urged me to accompany him, pointing out that to remain in the apartment alone with ever-present reminders of my loss were to nurse my grief and keep the wound always fresh

"Unnumbered cords, frail strands full fraught with pain,
That join the soul to things of time and sense."

The thought of leaving all that held the nearness of his spirit was repugnant to me. I wanted to be alone with my grief. Gradually I came to realize that it was for the best. Experience, too—simple, honest soul—was shaken by the suddenness and swiftness of our loss. I decided to send her to her home for a rest and change of scene. After all, what did it matter where I went? . . . Boy was not there. . . .

The season dragged by, drab and comfortless. Will's devotion to me was the only ray

of light in the murkiness of my spirit. Our common grief had bridged the gulf between us. All the gentleness, the tenderness in his nature seemed to revive. He never left me to accept invitations in which he knew I could not share; something like the old camaraderie was restored between us. I found a kind of balm in the thought that, if the death of my son had been the means of bringing my husband and me closer together, the sacrifice had not been in vain—and yet—and yet . . . in the inner consciousness of my heart I knew the truth: had I been called upon to choose, the sacrifice had not been Boy. Truly, life is a continuous compromise.

The season ended, we returned to New York. Because we could not afford to move—there being the usual deficit in the family budget—we opened the apartment. To dwell upon the resurging pain which the reminders in my home undammed were to make fetish of my grief. Neither did I ask Experience to return. She, too, belonged to the past of things.

Will had determined to leave his present management and seek new fields. The company for the next season was to be curtailed and the cast cheapened, an extended tour of

one-night stands. The summer was passed in New York, and luckily, except for periodic waves of tropical heat, the weather was not unendurable. Will spent a goodly part of his time at the Lambs' Club, where he said he kept in touch with the activities of the managerial world. The season promised to be backward. Plans appeared to be slow of consummation. The tedium began to tell on Will's nerves and his temper, especially when he found himself suspended from the Lambs for non-payment of dues. None of his colleagues came to his rescue. That the theatrical profession is a fraternal organization is another of those popular fallacies. There can be no spirit of fraternity in an overcrowded profession.

It became expedient that Will appeal to his father for financial assistance, a resort which he postponed as long as possible, since the old gentleman invariably accompanied his grudging remittances with advice, censure and no little contumely. Will could not understand why he was not "snapped up" at once, so he expressed it. He had made good in his last engagement, had kept himself well advertised (*vide* the press-agent) and it would appear that, as a natural sequence, his services should

be in demand. He commented on the statement made by several managers, viz.: they had nothing in his line. It was evident that in making a pronounced success in a certain *genre* of plays he had become identified with the one type of hero and the managers could "see" him in no other. Managers are, with rare exceptions, an unimaginative lot. In no other way can one explain the deluge of plays patterned on the same type: for example, let a manager by hit or miss produce successfully a play built around the Far West, immediately there spring up a dozen of the ilk. Or, again, let a play of farcical construction score a hit; the public is immediately surfeited with a run of farces. So with the actor. Let him once become identified with heroes of romantic drama and the manager fears to entrust him with the dress-suit rôle, and vice versa.

More and more I was impressed with the ephemeral quality of the actor's success. At best the actor's is an aleatory profession and, as in all games of chance, the losses score highest.

It was well along in the autumn when Will signed and immediately began rehearsals. The star was a petulant little lady who, by grace of

her marriage with a manager, had been hoisted to her present position, a position to which she was not equal either by training, personality or talent. For several seasons the husband-manager had invested—and lost—large sums of money in the attempt to build up a following for his wife. The present venture was a kind of last straw. That there was more or less "feeling" between the couple was evinced by their frequent *passages d'armes* of a personal nature, at rehearsals. Accustomed as he was to the thoroughness of the stage-management under which he had worked during the past two seasons, Will found the hit and miss methods of his new affiliation disconcerting and irritating. In addition to this, the husband-manager-director had a picturesque if not a literate command of the language. He was in the habit of standing in the centre aisle or at the back of the theatre and shouting his directions to the members on the stage. When, as sometimes happened, a member resented the manager's method of criticism in no uncertain terms, that personage would back down and with tearful, if blasphemous, appeal explain himself. On opening nights, in response to the persistent calls from the claque, the man-

ager reluctantly (!) appeared before the curtain to bow his acknowledgment—in shirt sleeves—his air of exhaustion contrasting sharply with his jaws which worked a piece of chewing-gum like a ticket-chopper in rush hours. It would seem that the vanity of actors is not an exclusive attribute.

The metropolitan reception of the play and star was not one of unmitigated joy. The husband-manager, not liking the opinions of the press, talked back both in print and from the stage. Two ghastly weeks in New York, playing to a papered house or empty seats, and the company took to the coal regions. Another fortnight was spent sparring for open time, reluctantly doled out to the weak, and the company gave up the ghost. Obviously Will had entered upon a cycle of bad luck. I took upon myself to look for an engagement. Not only on account of the material consideration, but because the emptiness and loneliness of my life had become no longer endurable. Self-imposed tasks palled. My mind refused to concentrate upon the line of study I had outlined. "And thus the native hue of resolution is sickled o'er with the pale cast of thought." The career I once planned for myself had been consigned to

the dump heap of lost illusions. I could not touch the clay which once had thrilled me with ambition.

Will went about with me on my visits to various managers. He encouraged me in my intention and I was glad to interest him, to take him out of himself, as it were. His run of hard luck had preyed on his nerves and frayed his temper. There was reason for me to suspect he was drinking more than was good for him. Finally there came an offer of a small part in a musical comedy which had settled down for a run in New York. The fact that I was possessed of no great amount of vocal equipment did not preclude me from the field. The manager intimated that what I lacked in voice I made up in pulchritude, though I recall he referred to it as "shape." The salary was to be thirty-five dollars a week. The gowns were furnished—those worn by my predecessor—though I was called upon to supply my own shoes, silk hose and gloves. In reality I was to be nothing more than a show-girl, with a few lines to speak.

Will was in front the night I made my début. After the performance we went to a restaurant, there to talk it over. Congratulat-

ing me on my "getting away with it" and telling me how "peachy" I looked, he laughingly predicted a line of Johnnies at the stage door, flowers, and the usual perquisites of the chorus girl. . . . "If you weren't wise to the game, I'd give you a few pointers," he said, . . "but" . . and here he reached across the table and patted me on the hands . . "I reckon you're equal to any situation, old pard. . . . Just sit tight until I again land on my feet and then you can cut it out, if you like."

I did not find myself subjected to any fierce onslaughts on the part of the Johnnies or *viveurs* about town. Once or twice I received a note accompanied with flowers. The former I destroyed; the latter I promptly presented to the least pretty of my five dressing-room mates. She wore them on the stage and made eyes at the donor, who occupied an upper box, much to my amusement and to his confusion. I discouraged intimacies of all kinds, with one exception. But of this more hereafter. The stage director never attempted to chuck me under the chin or call me "baby," as he did other members of the cast. I had had my little run-in with him at rehearsal when he essayed to yell at me after the manner of his kind. I

stopped short, the orchestra petered out in discord and, walking to the apron of the stage, I modulated my voice, so that it reached him quietly but effectively, where he stood in the back of the theatre. "Mr. M————," I had said, "if you have any further suggestion to offer, you will please do so in a less offensive manner. My hearing is good and I believe I have the average amount of intelligence." There was an ominous silence and the martinet started down the aisle. Behind me I heard a buzz of approbation from the girls who had suffered at his hands. Just why the bully changed his mind I never knew. At any rate the rehearsal was continued. Later the manager chaffed me about the incident. The manager was an undeveloped little person—as if some hereditary blight had nipped him in the bud—distinctly Semitic in all his traits. Will had known him from the time he had abandoned haberdashery for theatrical management; indeed, I believe he had been a member of the manager's first venture into the field.

One feature which stands out most prominently in retrospect was my adaptability to my surroundings. Conditions which once had shocked me no longer left an impression. Ob-

viously the finer edge of my nature had worn blunt. Things appeared to me in a kind of impersonal light. My present path had been chosen from necessity; a part of the scheme of things, yet a thing apart. The commonplace round of concerns and duties went on, but life, real life, for the time being lay fallow. Occasionally, when I caught myself dropping into the slang and jargon I had absorbed from my fellow workers, I mused a bit and pulled myself up with a sharp curb. But, as I have said, I was no longer disturbed or impressed with conditions which once had sent the blood to my cheeks.

The easy familiarity between the sexes which I had thought sufficiently deplorable in the "legitimate" branch of the theatrical profession was in the comic opera world flagrantly increased. I have heard a distinction made between immorality and unmorality, but I fail to observe any slight deviation from the general result. Vulgar stories, steeped in smut, went the rounds. Each new one was welcomed and passed down the line. If one betrayed her disapproval by ignoring the *raconteur,* she was laughed down and thereafter referred to as "very up-stage." In the dressing-rooms mod-

esty of person was an unknown quantity. Not infrequently I found "extra" gentlemen performing lady's maid service for one of the girls. On one occasion when I slipped on the iron stairway leading to the stage, badly wrenching my ankle, a sturdy stage-hand picked me up, carried me to my dressing-room, and, before I realized what he was about, had pulled off my shoe and was in way of removing my stocking when I protested. "O, well, if you're that fussy—" he said as he went out. . . .

One of the most pernicious influences to be contended against by the girl who tries to go straight is the never-ceasing topic of "men" and "money." The man behind the bankroll is the basis, in one form or another, of all the chorus-girl conversations. To be picked out by a man of means to marry, or, failing this, to be set up in a "swell" apartment and "put it all over" the girls of her acquaintance, is the hope which springs eternal in the chorus-girl breast. Even in hard times, when the champagne appetite needs must be quenched with beer, she dreams of diamonds. Standing in the wings, waiting for the cue, one hears an exchange of banter such as this: "Heard you

was at the Abbaye last night. . . . Where'd you pick him up? . . . Say, don't you believe anything he tells you! Henny knows all about him and he says that for a tight-wad he's got Russell Sage skinned to death!" Or . . "I was at Morrisheimer's today; they're havin' a sale of models. I gotta three-piece velvet suit for thirty-five dollars, marked down from seventy." . . . "Say! He must be good to you. Why don't you introduce me to some of your gentlemen friends?"

I once asked a chorus girl of considerable notoriety how she had come to enter the profession. "O," she replied, "my folks was the poor but respectable kind. There was a big family of us, and I, bein' the oldest, had to help out. I didn't get much schoolin' and, after tryin' half a dozen things like bein' a chamber maid, waitin' in a restaurant and that kind of business, I tumbled to the fact that I wusn't bad lookin'. That's all I had; my face and my shape, and the stage was the best place to show 'em."

My dressing-room mates were typical show-girls; manièré, self-conscious and always on parade. It was painfully evident they felt themselves above the chorus, though some of

them were pleased to forget the fact that they were but recently graduated from that class.

One of these girls afterward married an English baronet. I have since wondered what disposition was made of the baronet's mother-in-law. I made her acquaintance in the dressing-room one evening, whither she had come to mend her daughter's wardrobe. She was a splendid specimen of the complaisant stage-mamma. Clad in rusty black, her portly figure bulging from ill-fitting stays, one might mistake her for the type of scrub-woman one sees about the large office buildings of early mornings, but never, never would one suspect her of being the mother of this near-Vere-de-Vere. Voluble to a point of madness, she would acquaint you with the family history, the cause and intimate details of her husband's untimely taking off and the great hopes she entertained for her daughter's "getting on." Sometimes she brought with her the youngest of her offspring, a little girl of six who had already made her début as a child-actress. Like all children of the stage, she was precocious and most unchild-like. In the enactment of laws which are aimed to protect the child-labourer, an attempt is being made to bring about an exemption of their

application to the stage-child. That the child-actor receives better pay, that he or she works less hours and under more sanitary surroundings than do children in other trades and professions, cannot be gainsaid. But is the economic welfare of the child the prime and only consideration? Is the physical protection the one and uppermost consummation to be desired? What of the spiritual, the moral side of the stage-child? If environment bear the strong influence on human life we are led to believe, then should the stage-child be removed from its infectious surroundings. The old saw to the effect of pitch and defilement is here most applicable.

I have referred elsewhere to the exception I made in my discouragement of intimacies. On that morning at rehearsal when I had resented the stage-director's mode of criticism, among others who had approved my act was a girl whose face had at once attracted me. She was pretty and of less common type than the chorus averages. There was something individual about her. Her appearance was neat and I had observed that her clothes were neither so new nor so extreme as were those of her colleagues. Also I was impressed with a quiet

refinement of manner and her usage of good English. As we became better acquainted she sometimes waited for me after the performance and we walked together to the underground station, where our lines diverged. Later I had asked her to dine with me on a Sunday when Will was away on a week-end motor trip. She appeared to enjoy the home atmosphere and visited with me in the kitchen while I was preparing dinner. Feeling that with our reduced income we could not afford it, I had dispensed with a servant. And as Will rarely, if ever, dined at home, my housekeeping duties were not onerous.

"This is what I have always longed for—a little home all my own," Leila had remarked, smiling wistfully. . . . It was after dinner and we had settled ourselves for a chat.

"Then, in the name of common sense, dear girl, why did you go on the stage? Home life and a stage career are as antipodal as the poles."

"And yet you manage to blend the two rather charmingly," she retorted.

"Absurd! I'm not trying for a career, and as for home life . . my dear child, it's the merest pretense. Half the time we are not at

home and the flat has either to be let or remain closed. One never knows from day to day when the furniture will be packed off to storage."

"Yes . . I presume you are right. . . . How did I come to go on the stage? . . . Well, I suppose it was because I wanted a career of some kind. . . . I wanted to *do something;* you know how empty and shallow the average girl's life is, with the endless round of parties, visits, fancy work and that sort of thing. I was an only daughter, too. Father was well-to-do and wrapped up in the affairs of the small city in which we lived. After he died, mother thought she would like to travel. We went abroad. It was over there that the idea of a career took a stronger hold on me. About the only talent I could lay any claim to was music. I had always played and sung at our home concerts and church sociables. . . . But mother didn't encourage me in my ambitions. She argued that, since father had left us comfortably fixed, why should I want to worry my head about work? Besides, she said my first duty was to her as long as she lived. So there it rested. . . . We just drifted from place to place . . vegetating . . "

"Some parents are like that," I commented.

Leila rested her chin in her palms and went on . . "After mother died I resolved to go after that career. I returned abroad to study . . " She chuckled a little, probably, at the remembrance. . . . "Of course, the *teachers* said I had a great future ahead of me . . with application and patience . . infinite patience. Meanwhile I must study—and pay exorbitant prices for my tuition. The income which had been ample for my needs heretofore did not go very far under the new régime. I found it necessary to cut into the capital, realizing the danger of such a move, but soothing my fears with the dream of my great future. . . . Well, honey, the splendid career as you see has ended in the chorus. . . . And, what's more, I'm living on my salary." She picked up Will's guitar and began strumming on it. "What I can't understand," she continued after a while, "what I feel most is the fact that I don't seem able to pull myself out of it. I see other girls lifting themselves to better positions; I know I can sing better than any one of them. . . . There was Miss Nelson whom you succeeded. As soon as I heard she was to retire I went to the manager and asked for her place. He

sent me to the musical director, who heard me sing, commented favorably and said he would report to the manager. That was the last I heard of it until rehearsal was called and I learned that you had been engaged. . . . Tell me, honestly, what's the matter with me? Why don't I get on? Is it because I haven't any *pull* or because—" She did not finish her sentence, but switched to another. . . . "Take our prima donna for example: three years ago she was playing a part not bigger than yours. Now look at her! My voice is as good as hers, if not better, but I can't get them to let me even understudy her." . . .

A vision of the prima donna passed before my eye; an insipidly pretty woman whose sudden rise to fame had turned her empty little head. Vain, impetuous, over-keyed, already the marks of dissipation were leaving their indelible stamp. Whenever I saw her, resplendent in sables, dangling her jewelled gold-mesh purse, my mind reverted to a well-known clubman's comment on virtue: "I always measure the chastity of the unprotected female by the size of her gold-mesh bag; the larger the bag the less the virtue."

Leila, bent on relieving her mind and heart,

went on: "When I went into the chorus it was a choice between that and Macy's. Of course I'd heard things about the life, but I told myself that a girl who wants to can go straight in any walk of life. I had all those copy-book maxims at the tip of my tongue: 'Virtue is its own reward,' and 'Then let us be up and doing, with a heart for any fate; still achieving, still pursuing, learn to labour and to wait,' or something like that. . . . Willie Stewart—you know the little black-eyed girl who plays next to me on the left—it was she who gave me my first eye-opener. Seeing that I was new at the business, she came to me shortly after we opened and asked me if I didn't want to meet some gentlemen; that she had been asked to bring some of the girls with her to a beefsteak party which was to be pulled off that night. I thanked her and told her I did not care to go. Willie squinted her eyes a little in sizing me up, then treated me to the following advice: 'Look here, angel child, you'd better go back to home and mother. This is no place for a minister's daughter. If you haven't got sense enough to take a chance when it's brought to you on a silver tray—well, all I've got to say is that you're in wrong. Managers want the

girls that are popular and the way to be popular is to mingle. Just remember that you don't get anything for nothing in this business or in no other, as far as I've been able to observe. It's give up—*give up all along the line* and it's only the foxy dame that gets what's comin' to her, even then!' "

"Willie has a very large gold bag, I have noticed," I said.

"And a sealskin coat," Leila added. Then she jumped to her feet and struck at the sofa pillows viciously. . . . "It isn't the clothes and that sort of thing that appeal to me. It isn't the fact that I'm living in a dingy little room and trying to make ends meet; I'd live on a box of Uneeda Biscuits a day if I saw any hope, the faintest ray of hope that I could win out clean, on merit alone, in the end. . . . Sometimes I think I'm wrong and that they are right—"

"Leila! You don't think anything of the sort! You know you are right! Hold on a little while longer; you're sure to win! Why, with a voice like yours, and your beauty, I should feel so sure of winning that nothing else would matter—and it doesn't, Leila, nothing else really counts if you live up to the best

that's in you!" I had worked myself up to a state of enthusiasm where I almost believed my own words. I took her by the shoulders and held her at arm's length. We looked into each other's eyes, each trying to pierce the veil behind which are concealed our true thoughts.

It was nearing the holidays when Will signed for the engagement which was destined to play such an important rôle in our future lives. The star was of foreign origin, with a fascinating accent and a steadily increasing reputation for eroticism. Under the guise of "high-brow" drama she revelled in the portrayal of abnormal femininity. Her adeptness in "suggestive" scenes, to which she lent a startling verisimilitude, soon gained for her a large, if not altogether intellectual, following. Will was not altogether satisfied with his rôle, but what actor ever is? I consoled him with the fact that the salary was good and that but little of the present season remained.

With Will on the road, left to myself in the empty apartment, the blue devils renewed their lease. And when the approach of the Christmas season began to manifest itself in shop-windows and in holiday rush, my heartache increased manifold. Leila and I were

much together in those days. My little friend's increasing depression, instead of augmenting my own, acted as a spur to brighter moods. Together we made the round of the shops or tramped through the snow in Central Park. Sometimes we lingered to watch the young people skating on the ice; again we hitched ourselves to sleds to the merriment of small folk. Coming home alone from a matinée I would find myself following a party of children out on an ante-holiday survey. Standing close to them I listened to their prattle and eager expectancy of a visit from Santa Claus. . . . If the tears came I swallowed hard. No one was near to heed. In the seclusion of my home I fought it out alone.

It had been my intention to carry a box of flowers to the dear one's grave on Christmas morning. Passing one day through a wretched quarter of the East Side in search of a dilatory laundress, my steps halted in front of a cheap toy-shop. Beside me stood a small boy, clinging to the hand of an older girl, their eyes riveted upon the display within. With one grimy little hand, stiff and rough from the cold, the small man smeared the tears from his eyes and snivelled. His threadbare coat, sizes too

large for his meagre frame, his toes showing through his shoes. The girl's face was peaked and old, as if the despair of life had already left its stamp. There was something infinitely tender in the way she held the boy close to her, mutely comforting his grief, her eyes meeting half defiantly the tinselled magnet of the shop-window, her lips compressed to stop their mutinous tremble. When at last I brought myself to break in upon their thoughts, they looked at me like startled fawns. . . .

The overture was on when I rushed into the theatre that afternoon. With Leila's help I was in time for my cue. And it was with Leila's help that I dressed the toys and trimmed the tree and between us, late on Christmas Eve, we toted a big basket on and off the cars, up the dingy stairs where Maggie kept house for "me brudder" while their mother went out to work. . . . It was Boy's offering, not mine. . . .

CHAPTER XVII.

COMING out of the stage door after the performance one night shortly after the New Year, the back-door keeper met me with the information that a gentleman was waiting to see me. Before I could frame a reply a bulky figure emerged from the gloom. I recognized Mr. F. of Chicago. There was something akin to embarrassment in the way he proffered his hand, though his grip was not lacking in geniality. Of the two I was the more self-possessed. To my polite inquiries about his family he murmured something about their being all right, he guessed, and abruptly changed the subject by asking me to "come jump in a taxi and let's go somewhere for a bite of supper." I did not understand why I so readily acquiesced. On the way to Rector's—he himself having made the choice of restaurant—we exchanged amenities. I believe I deplored the fact that I was not dressed for the occasion, and he had replied with a flattering speech in-

tended to salve my vanity. After he had ordered the most expensive items on the menu, he settled back in his chair, toyed with his fork, looked at me searchingly, then broke out laughing. The laughter was not pleasant to the ear; it left an unpleasant apprehension. He leaned across the table with a confidential air and smiled quizzically. . . .

"Do you remember the last time we had supper together?"

I nodded and coaxed a smile.

"Perfectly," I responded.

A silence, while Mr. F. traced strange hieroglyphics on the napery. After a while he tossed aside the fork with the air of one casting off unpleasant memories, and settled back in his chair.

"Tell me about yourself," he commanded. "How is the world using you? What in the name of wonder ever took you on the comic opera stage? I couldn't believe my own eyes when I spotted you tonight, and, of course, the name on the programme meant nothing to me. I shook my friends as soon as the performance was over and interviewed the back-door keeper. He told me you were Mrs. Hartley in private life. . . . Well, what's the answer?"

"There's nothing mysterious about my present occupation. Mr. Hartley hasn't been especially lucky this season, and when a chance to help out a bit presented itself I took it . . that's all. . . . I presume you know that we lost our boy . . "

"Yes—yes . . I knew, of course." His tone was curt, but I understood his reluctance to dwell upon the subject. The return of the waiter ended a painful silence. After that Mr. F. kept up a running fire of gossip and questions about stage life. But beneath the surface I sensed and lent him tacit aid in his effort to steer clear of the topic I knew to be uppermost in his mind. From time to time rumours of a fresh rupture with his wife had reached me. In fact, it was Will who had acquainted me with the news of their final estrangement. He confided the details of the lady's latest excursion into the realm of the illicit, with the sententious air of, "There! Didn't I predict what would happen?" and a shrug of the shoulders. I am not sure that it was not Will's intent to sympathize with himself as a victim of circumstances over which he had no control. Indeed, the occasional bursts of confidences which he thrust upon me, and in which he discussed quite

frankly the indiscretions of certain lion-hunting ladies, were made, I felt, with the hope of impressing upon me the pitfalls with which a man in his profession is surrounded. Or was it vanity, or a desire to fan the old flame of passion he once had aroused—a passion, which, if the paraphrase is pardonable, was now "tame and waited on judgment?"

In some way—I am not certain how it came about, since "made" conversation is at best disjointed and lacks in sequence—a random remark inspired a challenge from Mr. F., who offered to lay a bet that I was in the wrong. "O, no," I had replied, "I don't want you to lose; besides, you do not pay your gambling debts promptly. Do you know you never sent me that box of candy I won from you in Cincinnati? Mr. F. . . you're not a good sport!" With a shock I realized I was in shallow waters. . . . He looked at me with his eyes narrowed to mere slits. . . . "Well, little woman, I can't say that of you, can I? . . . I can't say that you're not a good sport—after that performance in Cincinnati." . . .

I flushed but made a heroic effort to control my voice. "I don't think I follow you." Mr. F. beat up the bubbles in his glass and watched

them come to the surface before he answered.

"Of course you've heard about her latest affair with that Italian opera singer. . . . Well, I caught her with the goods this time. . . . For the sake of the children I'm letting her get the divorce. . . . " He left off frowning and contemplated me with an amused smile. "Say, little woman, you did put it all over me there in Cincinnati, didn't you? . . . I suppose you're wondering how I got wise to it? Well, I wrung the confession out of her; I wouldn't let her get the divorce until she told me the truth, and then I checked it up through her sister, who's a pretty good sort. . . . All my life I've had a deep-rooted respect for a game sport. . . . When I look at that pretty little face of yours and think of the job you cooked up at a moment's notice—well, I take off my hat to you, that's all! . . . Look here, little woman: if anything ever goes wrong between you and handsome Bill—and by Gad! I thought it had when I saw you on the stage tonight—if ever you need a friend, just tap the wires. There's my club address . . and, little lady—don't be afraid that I'll ask anything in return—do you follow me? I'm not any better than

the rest of my kind, but I think I know the real thing when I meet it."

While donning my wraps in the cloak-room some time later, I was surprised to see my little friend Leila enter and present her coat-check to the maid. She flushed a little in surprise as she greeted me: "Why, Mrs. Hartley! I didn't know you were here! Where were you sitting? Why didn't you tell me you were coming?"

"I didn't know myself. I found an old acquaintance waiting, and of course he wanted to see 'where the soubrettes hang out.'"

"How funny! My coming was unexpected, too. I'll tell you all about it tomorrow." She hurried away, a little eagerly, I thought. As I passed out in response to a beckon from Mr. F. I saw Leila being helped into a handsome fur coat.

I told myself it was none of my business; that Leila knew perfectly well what she was doing and that any amount of advice from me would not only not be acted upon, but would be resented. Already she avoided me. To my pleadings that I was lonely—would she not dine with me at my home?—she responded with ever-ready but piffling excuses and subter-

fuges. I would see her emerge from her dressing-room after the performance, prettily dressed, get into a waiting taxicab and be whirled away. The situation preyed on my mind. Once I took courage in both hands and called at her lodging-house only to be told that Miss Moore had moved away a month since. I got the new address from the back-door keeper, and when my little friend was out of the cast through illness I seized the opportunity to call on her.

It was one of those smaller apartment hotels in the West Forties; I was taken up in the elevator without challenge. The coloured maid who cautiously opened the door said she did not know whether her mistress would see me. Something in my manner, however, caused her to stand aside and let me enter. The rooms were tastefully if cheaply furnished. Leila was lying on a couch, propped with pillows and clad in a dainty silk kimono. She was taken by surprise and flushed a little as she extended her hand. The maid placed a chair for me.

"I—I thought you had forgotten me," she stammered as I offered the flowers I had brought. "How good of you!"

"They're only seconds, Leila, but the best I

could afford." And, compared to the big American Beauties reposing in a vase near at hand, they certainly did look shop-worn.

"It's a beastly day, isn't it? Let me send for a cup of tea or maybe you'd like a high-ball. . . ."

I declined both. The maid disappeared. Leila squirmed about on her pillows. . . .

"I'm sorry to see you ill, Leila," I ventured by way of breaking the ice.

"O, I'm not really ill . . . only a slight cold. I'm a bit run down and the Judge—that is—the doctor thought I should rest for a while. I'm not going back to the theatre this season. . . . It's awfully good of you to bother about me. . . ."

"Leila?" I said finally. . . . "Leila, is it worth it?"

"Is what worth——" . . .

"All this." I indicated the apartment, the piano, the silk négligée—and the ring on her finger. . . . "Is it worth the price you are paying?" I asked gently. She lifted her shoulders.

"I don't know!" Her tone was half question, half defiance. . . "I *do* know that the other way wasn't worth the sacrifices, the

scrimping and mean pinching. I couldn't go on like that—I couldn't! I am young; I want some of the good things of life while I am still young . . . and I was lonely. I didn't fit into my environment."

"I understand, Leila. . . . Perhaps I appreciate the loneliness, the rebellion, better than you think. . . . You see other girls enjoying the good things of life and apparently happy. But, after all, happiness is purely relative, and what makes for their happiness might not make for yours. Leila, dear girl, couldn't you make up your mind to stick it out just a little while longer? . . . Things were sure to come your way—or, perhaps, you would meet the right man and marry and settle down in the little home of your own which you told me you have always craved."

"The right kind of men don't marry chorus girls. The exceptions are rare. And what manner of men are they who *do* marry a girl out of the chorus? Old worn-out roués, almost senile from the debauched lives they have led. They crave something young and fresh as an elixir of life. Sometimes it's a young blood with money; a black sheep of the family who drinks and sports, and in the end there's

divorce if nothing worse. . . . I couldn't marry a man like either of these. . . . It's a mistake to be too fastidious. . . ."

"Is—is—he married?"

"He—O . . . Yes, he's married—in a way. His wife and he have not really lived together for years. For the sake of the family they keep up appearances. . . . She doesn't understand him. . . ."

"Did *he* tell you that—and you *believe* it?"

"But I know it's true! You'd believe it, too, if ever you were to see her. He married her when he was young and poor."

"I presume they loved each other then; she probably pinched and scrimped in those days to help him—to help him get where he is today."

"I don't know anything about that, of course. But I do know that I admire him; he has a wonderful mind. It's a privilege to be associated with a man like him. If you knew him, you would not think so badly of the—the arrangement."

I left my chair to sit beside her on the couch.

"Dear girl," I said, slipping my hand in hers, "Don't misunderstand me. I'm not sitting in judgment, neither am I criticizing you.

But I want you to think of the future. Have you ever thought of the time when you will be no longer young? Have you never observed that type of woman one finds hanging around restaurants or hotel corridors, hoping to pick up a man, any man, it doesn't matter what kind of a man so long as he has a little money? These women are getting along in years, taking on flesh, hiding the ravages of time and dissipation with rouge, hair-dyes and more dissipation. They are fighting life and getting the worst of it, having put into life only their worst: thrown from one man's arms into another's: down the line—always down grade, lower and lower until—until what remains? The streets, the work-house, or suicide. . . . Have you thought of that?"

"No! *No! No!*—and I don't want to think of it!" She pounded her fists vehemently together. . . . "I'm tired of thinking of the future! I've done nothing all my life but think and live in the future—and now I'm going to get what there is—all there is—out of the present, if it's only a pretty gown, only a bright flower! What incentive has a girl like me to be good? Go away! Go away, please, and don't bother about me!" . . .

As I walked up Fifth Avenue on my way home, the shops and various dressmaking establishments were disgorging their workers: pale girls, for the most part, poorly clad. Here and there one prettier than the rest, showing in her dress the innate love of display; passing the well-dressed saunterer along the way with a pert glance, an inviting eye; dreaming of the silks she had handled all day; longing for the comforts of life which money alone can buy. . . . After all, is it a question of morals or economics which leads these girls astray? As my little friend had put it, "What incentive have they to go straight?"

CHAPTER XVIII

WILL'S season closed early. My own promised to run well into the summer months. Will's return was marked by a happier frame of mind and a corresponding good humour. He had been re-engaged for the coming year, and the fact that his maternal grandmother had recently died and left him a small legacy, which would be made over to him during the summer, relieved his mind of the worry over money matters which had been oppressing him. With characteristic prodigality he invested in a complete new wardrobe—to be paid for when the legacy arrived. Also he contemplated buying a motor-car, though I endeavoured to point out to him that a trip abroad would be a better investment, if spend his money he must.

It was well along in June when—with a silent *Te Deum*—I saw the notice posted. One of those periods of tropical heat had descended upon New York and brought the run of the opera to an abrupt close. It was a welcome

relief to be allowed to remain at home for days at a time. I set about to refurnish my summer wardrobe. With the acquisition of an automobile still pending in his mind, Will spent much of his time away from home, trying out various makes of cars.

It was during one such week-end hejira that John Gailbraith returned from abroad. He had only that morning disembarked, and after settling himself in a downtown hotel had come to call on us. I hailed his advent with delight. Our long talks, the exchange of ideas, his alert mind refreshed and stimulated my own. Will once laughingly remarked that I had developed into a veritable human question mark. But in no other way could I induce our friend to talk about himself or his art. He had travelled much and when once started on the subject would retail his experiences in foreign lands. My interest was kept on the *qui vive*. Then there was his work and achievement. Long were the discussions and criticisms of the "Super-creation" and the thoughts and ideas which had led to its conception.

As yet, I had not been inclined to resume my own work which my son's death had caused me to lay aside. Now, under the influence of my

master's encouragement and sympathy, the old ambition quickened. As the summer progressed we came to see a great deal of John Gailbraith. Indeed, he became a part of our daily life. A genuineness which made itself felt, a cleanliness of mind and speech, together with a quiet humour and a gift of sympathetic understanding, endeared him to his friends. Will shared my feeling, else he had not thrown us so continuously together.

"John Gailbraith is one of the few men in the world to whom I would entrust my wife's honour," he had said one day. I had chided Will for so repeatedly throwing me upon our friend for amusement or companionship. It had become a common thing for Will to hail his friend thus: "Old man, if you haven't anything better to do tonight, take my missus out to dinner, will you? I have an engagement to hear a play read," or, "I say, Jack old boy, look after the missus while I'm away. I've been asked to go on a motor-trip for a few days and I know it's punishment to drag the poor girl along." (Parenthetically Will rarely asked me to join him on these motor-trips.) It was on such an occasion that I had reproved Will for saddling John Gailbraith with a re-

sponsibility which may not have been to his liking. "There may be other friends to whom he may wish to devote himself; besides is it wise that I be seen so continually in his company and without my husband? You know how malicious the world is. People will say——"

"O, Hell! I believe with Bernard Shaw: 'They say—what do they say? Let them say!' People will always find something to criticize. So long as I am satisfied it's nobody's business. I'm not afraid, girlie, of anyone taking you away from me." And he dismissed the subject.

My husband not only encouraged the idea of my working under the guiding hand of the sculptor but developed an enthusiasm which quite took away my breath. In one of his impulsive moods he rented a studio from an artist member of the Players' Club, who was planning to go abroad for a year. "It's just the thing she needs; something to occupy her mind. Besides, any little pleasure I can throw her way is coming to her, after the way she stood by when I was down on my luck. It isn't every wife who can support her husband, is it, old man?" And Will slipped his arm about

my shoulders with an amused wink. He was in high humour these days.

There was a great scrubbing and cleaning before I pronounced the studio habitable. Will said I was not a true artist. I failed to find art and dirt synonymous or mutually connotating each the other.

The building which housed the studio was in a small street or, more properly, an area-way in the vicinity of lower Fifth Avenue within a stone's throw of Washington Square. John Gailbraith said it was his favourite part of the city. It came to be mine. Sometimes, after we had taken luncheon at a near-by restaurant, we would stroll in the square or sit on one of the benches. Our lounging neighbours were interesting studies in real life. John would point out the various foreign types and compare them with their countrymen on their native heath. At other times I would have our recently acquired cook-lady prepare a dainty lunch basket, which I carried to the studio, and at the noon-hour, while John made the tea, I laid the table. Here we would linger, absorbed in the discussion which with passing days grew more frank and intimate. I no longer felt cramped or warped. Expansion

had become an almost measurable sensation. During our vari-toned *pour-parler,* one subject was by seemingly tacit consent taboo. No reference or allusion was ever made to my conjugal affairs. Whatever John Gailbraith thought or knew concerning Will's peccadillos, he gave no intimation. It was not possible that he had not heard of my husband's various *liaisons.* In fact, Will, himself, made no attempt to conceal the attentions of certain women who rang up at his home under flimsiest pretence. He joked lightly about their indiscretions and commented on the fact that he "was getting to be the real thing in the way of a matinée idol." The period following upon my son's death when Will had devoted himself to me with something of the sweetness of our early married life was short-lived. And if I closed my eyes and ears to the recurring lapses of his fidelity it was because I still hoped that some day he would need my love. Whether John Gailbraith believed there was an understanding between my husband and me I could only surmise. To have him regard me in the light of a complaisant wife gave me many uncomfortable moments, yet I could not touch upon the subject. The truth lovingly told is

that I came nearer to being happy during those summer months than I had been for—how many years had passed since Will and I had set up housekeeping in the little furnished flat of halcyon days? . . .

When Will's absence from home became more frequent and of long duration I exerted myself to greet his return with a pleasant word and a serene face. And if, sometimes, I felt John's eyes upon me—those great gray eyes with large iris and the black fringed lids—I strove the harder to dissemble.

Sometimes Will would swoop down on us with a noisy party in tow and insist upon an impromptu dinner in the workshop. The suggestion was invariably hailed with delight by the women, who regarded the studio as an open sesame to forbidden fruit and free speech, while to the men it connoted models in the nude and bacchanalia.

On one occasion Will brought his star to see the minute whirling figure the sculptor had but recently completed in refutation of the criticism that his work was effective only in large design. Posing as a *connoisseur,* the lady had expressed the wish to see John's work. I think I hated her at first glance. There was

something snake-like even in the movement of her body and in the craning of her long, thin neck from which a sharp jaw projected. She fascinated while she repelled. Being temperamentally reserved in the presence of strangers —and the lady temperamentally interested in the opposite sex—I had an opportunity to study her. My scrutiny was not unobserved. Indeed, she was always conscious of self, though apparently not self-conscious.

In the act of taking her leave she stopped quite suddenly and addressed herself to me: "And so you are *Meesus* Hartley. . . . What fine eyes you have . . . such . . . what *ees* the word? Yes, tangled, tangled depths . . . and the shadows! . . . If I were a man I should make love to *Meesus* Hartley. . . ." She shot a glance at John Gailbraith, then dropped her lids over her eyes. But the suggestion was not lost. It was not meant to be.

"Madame has a pleasing way of expressing herself," I drawled, meeting the much affected wide baby stare of her orbs with a like expression. Suggestion is insidiously effective. From the moment my husband's star had dropped the seed—thoughtlessly or maliciously, who shall say?—it took root. The calm surface over

which I had been gliding during the past months ruffled and disturbed my equilibrium. The old *camaraderie* between John Gailbraith and me gave way to self-consciousness on my part. I felt what I imagined might have been the sensation which overwhelmed Mother Eve after eating of the Tree of Knowledge. For the first time during our intercourse I looked upon John Gailbraith as man—myself, woman. I caught myself expecting, anticipating, parrying any indication on his part which might be construed as a prelude to tenderness. My attitude became constrained, unnatural; his, more gracious, gentle, tactful. Perhaps he analyzed my mood as the natural result of gossip which connected my husband's name with that of the "star." That he pitied me heaped coals of fire upon my head—and his. I was glad of the opportunity which took him to Washington in response to a letter from a prospective patron and left me to myself.

With mathematical precision I questioned myself: Why should I permit the insinuations of a not disinterested woman to mar a friendship which had become dear to me and which I had hoped to retain all my life? Was friendship between persons of opposite sex not possi-

ble? Can there be no relationship between man and woman disassociated from sex? Had this man by look or word professed other than friendship for me? Had I professed or felt any emotion other than which I indicated? Then why permit the bond to be severed by a wholly suppositious breach? I resolved that upon John's return to the city I should take up the thread where I had left off. There was consolation in the determination.

The time had arrived when I was to begin the nude of Boy in marble. It was to be my winter's work and I was eager to be well advanced with it before John went abroad again. I looked forward to his going with genuine regret. More and more Will had estranged himself from me: whether deliberately or not I was not prepared to answer. The relentless examination continued. What was it which held me to my husband? Did I still love him despite his infidelities, his ever-increasing neglect and selfishness? Or was it the tender memories of our youthful love at whose altar I worshipped, feeding the smouldering embers with incense of bruised and crushed illusions? Might I not, after all, with patience, devotion, tolerance and a single-heartedness of purpose

lead his wandering steps back to me? If life was barren now, what should it be without him? No, I must find my solace in my pride in him; must squeeze what comfort I might in helping him on to success; always with the hope—hope!—the promise-crammed!

It had become a custom of mine to carry my perturbation of heart and mind to my boy's grave; there, in the silence and the nothingness of life, to find a balm and fortitude. It was upon such a mission I set out one day late in September. Under the early autumn haze the meadows lay carpeted with golden rod and fleecy lace of the Queen's handkerchief. Soothed by this tryst with my loved one I returned to town prepared to take up the battle. Arriving at the Grand Central Station I decided to telephone to Will's club with the hope of finding he had returned during my absence. Stopping to pay the toll I glanced listlessly around the waiting-room. A familiar figure caused me to start forward, then draw back. There, coming through the station was my husband and his "star." From the handbags he carried—one of which I recognized as his—it was evident that they had come direct from the train. I recalled that Will had mentioned

the fact that the star had recently bought a country residence. And, too, it recurred to me that, when on Saturday night Will had telephoned me that he was at a Turkish bath and would remain there all day, his voice had a far-away sound to it, as if the message were at long distance. Sunday and Monday had passed with no word from him. I now understood where he had been. . . . I watched them drive away in a hansom. . . . Then I took a car home.

CHAPTER XIX

It had never before suggested itself to me that divorce was the only solution. Divorce had always appeared to me an acknowledgment of failure—failure of married life. When my son was taken from me I had cherished the delusion that our differences lay buried in his grave; that an adjustment of our married life was imminent. . . . Divorce! To give him his freedom; to turn me upon the world without anchor, ballast or compass. . . . A kind of terror took possession of me —not the terror of being thrown upon my own resources for a livelihood, since I was not dependent upon my husband for maintenance, a consideration which prevents many women from severing a bond which has become repugnant to them—but the terror of loneliness. I had already tasted of this bitterness—was I now to be surfeited with it? If only Boy had been spared to me! O, God, the pity of it all! . . . And yet, there was no other way.

To carry on the farce of married relationship; to submit to him, feeling only revulsion, repugnance, was nothing short of prostitution. And had I not already prostituted the best that was in me? Already the corroding influences around me had begun to tell. Even John Gailbraith had noticed the change in me and had alluded to it under the veil of kindly intent. If I were to save anything from the wreckage I must begin now, at once—before it was too late. I had seen women, good women, stronger women than myself, break under the strain of neglect and loneliness. . . . Well, I should not break. Pride should sustain me. . . . The future . . . no, I dared not yet think of the future. It made me quail and falter in my purpose—a purpose I determined to make known to my husband on his return.

Arriving at the studio the next morning earlier than was my custom (Will had not yet put in an appearance and the delay but strengthened my purpose), I found that John had not yet returned from breakfast. His small sleeping-quarters, giving upon the studio proper, were open and, without meaning to be curious, I paused in the doorway. A char-

coal sketch caught my eye. It was my own likeness. Scattered about the room were other sketches in various stages of development. I turned away, closing the door behind me. A warm flush suffused my being. I told myself it was shame at having intruded where I had not been bidden. . . . The various models of my son stood about the room and beckoned me. I ran my fingers over the little head, the pouting lips, and laid my cheek to his in silent salutation. The flood-gates strained and throbbed, threatening to break through. . . . A hand closed over mine. . . . I knew the hand. . . . In my complete immersion of thought I had not heard him come in. . . . I bent and pressed my lips upon his hand. . . . We stood looking at each other. Something of the shock I felt was mirrored in his eyes. . . . "Margaret . . Margaret," he had said . . and I, all unyielding, had sought the solace of his arms. . . .

Some time later he placed a chair for me and forced me gently down . . still quivering under the shock of revelation—revelation, not of what I had done, but of what I *felt!* The spurious sentiment which had held me to the past of things shook me with its last convul-

sive gasps. . . . Seated in front of me, his hands clasping mine, he read the confusion in my mind: confusion which speech alone could dissipate. . . .

"I want you to know what is in my mind and heart. . . . Doubt, a great question overshadows all else. I ask myself, can a woman love more than once? Is there a love for youth, a love for maturity? . . . You see, I am not sure that I really love you. I am haunted with the fear that my loneliness, my wounded pride, my unsatisfied life have caused me to seek consolation. And I have come to you for that consolation because I respect and admire you. Propinquity has proved that we are companionable and that we have much in common. But love demands something more than companionship, respect and admiration. *You* would demand something more. . . . Whether I am prepared to give you that which you demand is the question. As I feel now, I could not give you all the marriage relation implies. Do you understand my scruples? I have the feeling that to go from one man's arms to another's is nothing short of indecency. Perhaps time will alter the perspective. But I don't know, John, I don't know! You

see I want to be honest with you. I want to promise nothing about which I am not sure. . . . Then, there is your side of it. Can I give all a man expects from the woman he makes his wife? What have I to give? The bloom of my womanhood, the ardent passion of youth is forever gone. What is left may not satisfy you. . . . It is right that you should go away at once . . but I shall be lonely. . . . God and my heart alone know how lonely I shall be. . . . "

"Margaret, I thank you for your frankness. It only adds to my love for you. I appreciate and respect the feeling which bids you send me away at this time. Only don't sacrifice yourself to a prudish modesty; don't make a fetish of the past. Conserve your tender memories, if you will, but strip them of overvaluation. . . . You ask what have you to give. . . . Do you believe that because the bloom of your womanhood, your first passion and its fruition have belonged to another, that there is nothing left to give? Shall I be giving, does any man give, what he demands of a woman as the prerogative of his sex? You see, little woman, we are the victims of a false education. There is one standard for woman,

a different standard for man. It is this faulty double standard which is responsible for so many unhappy marriages. Some day this will all be changed. There are signs even today of the awakening. . . . Rid your mind once and for all of the spectre that the past will stand between us. Don't stultify your womanhood with a sentimentalism which is the curse of your sex. Life lies before you. The motherhood which your nature is crying out for is your rightful heritage. Look ahead, dear. Be true to the best that is in you . . and remember . . I am waiting. . . . "

I bade him good-bye—and had lingered. His strong hands clasped mine once more and held me there. . . . Mutely we looked into each other's eyes . . and thus my husband found us. . . . Coming in unannounced—whether intentionally was of small moment. We did not start; instead, I think he held me closer and met the other's sneer with a clear gaze. . . .

"Drop my wife's hand! Drop it, I say!" Will raised his cane to strike. I heard it snap and saw the bits in the other's hand. They clenched and glared at each other. . . .

"It is not necessary to indulge in heroics,"

I interposed. . . . "Suppose we talk it over—sensibly."

As we seated ourselves in preparation for the *"pour-parler"* the ironic humour of the situation came to my rescue. There was something absurdly theatrical about Will's attitude: a stentorian breathing; his stride across the room; a certain punctuated deliberation in the way he relieved himself of hat and gloves. I had seen him do thus in "strong" scenes on the stage, many and many's the time. I felt as if I were waiting for a cue. . . .

"So!" Will began after placing his chair firmly centre. . . . "So this is the way you abuse my confidence in you both! . . . My God, where is your sense of honour? If I hadn't trusted you so implicitly it wouldn't be so bad . . but to deliberately strike me from behind!" He rose, strode left centre and back again. "And you—my wife! *My wife!* I would not have believed it of you! I would never have believed it possible that my wife could so deceive me. . . . I've been warned about this. . . . I've been warned that such a thing as this might happen, but I refused to listen to gossip . . and nobody had the nerve to tell me the truth. . . . It's the same old

story . . a husband is always the last one to hear of his wife's infidelity. . . . Margaret! *Margaret! ! !*"

He stopped and waved his hand tragically in the direction of the models of Boy. . . .

"How could you. . . . How could you! . . . Here under the very eyes of our little son! Have you no shame, have you no reverence for the memory of that sainted child? . . . O, my God! Woman! . . . "

The mention of the child electrified me . . his cheap grief was revolting. . . .

"Stop that! Stop your acting! I'm sick, *sick, sick* unto death of the theatre! . . . Haven't you one honest, sincere emotion in your nature? Play the plain, rugged manly hero for once in your life, if act you must! . . . You wouldn't believe it of your wife . . *your* wife. . . . Do you think *your wife* is not made of flesh and blood and sensibilities like other human beings? What right have you to expect *anything* from your wife? How dare you conjure with my son's name? . . you, fresh from the arms of that—that creature! . . . "

Will eyed me narrowly.

"O . . so you've been listening to gossip,

have you? You've been discussing me between you, is that it? No doubt our friend, here, has done his best to put you wise, eh? I've had enough of this. . . . "

"You shall stay and hear me out! . . . It may surprise you to know that our friend, here, has not even intimated that he knew of your flagrant liaison. . . . It may shock you to know that it was your wife, the gutta-percha doll, who made the first declaration of tenderness, and I'm glad, I'm glad that I had so much real passion left! I'm glad to realize that after all I am a human being still, capable of feeling" . . . (a sudden weariness overcame me and left me limp and exhausted). "The trouble is—you are so impregnated with the rottenness about you, that you judge all by your own standard. . . . Let's have done with this! . . . Any further discussion will be carried on in the privacy of our home. . . . I am sorry . . sorry to have subjected you to this humiliating scene." My last words were addressed to the man who, tall, gaunt and pale, looked on—and waited. Through a blur of tears I held out my hand to him. . . . "Good-bye," I said and left them together.

It was dark when Will returned. I heard

him softly close the hall-door after him. He came into the room where I was lying and sat down beside me.

"Girlie . . I have something to say to you. . . . " His speech showed a little thickness and I smelled the liquor on his breath. His tone was kindly and I felt my rancour soften.

"First, don't let us lose our heads again . . it doesn't help matters. . . . Gailbraith and I have talked it over . . and the kindest thing I can do is to give you a divorce. . . . That sounds cold-blooded, doesn't it, between you and me? . . but it's the only thing . . the only right thing. Gailbraith says I'm not playing fair by you; that I am ruining your life and cheating you out of happiness which I can't give you myself . . and I guess he's right. . . . I guess Gailbraith's right. . . . We've drifted pretty far apart—I realize that now . . but—I want you to believe me when I say you are the only woman I have ever loved—or ever will love. The rest are just—experiences; some of them fascinating while they last, but none of them the real thing. No one will ever replace you in my heart . . that's certain. . . . It's too bad—too damned bad. . . . It's this hellish business! There

ought to be a law to prevent actors from marrying. . . . Now for the business end of it: I know you won't drag in any names as co-respondents. We'll fix that up later. I'll give you a lump sum, now—it can't be as large as I should like it to be, for there isn't much left. When my season opens I'll make you a weekly allowance until—until such a time as you are able to dispense with it. I'll see my lawyer—tomorrow, and fix things up with him. . . . . Don't you think it might be well for you to go away for a few days to avoid the newspaper blow-up?"

I nodded. I could not speak. . . .

"There, old pard . . don't take it so hard. . . . I guess that's all for the present. I'll be at the club any time you want me. . . . Good—good-night, Girlie . . and God bless you. . . . "

In the days which followed I appeared to myself like a rudderless ship in a choppy sea. I did not see John Gailbraith again. He sailed within a few days after the scene in the studio. In a letter written from the boat he told me he had not forced himself upon me, knowing my wishes and respecting them. "Be true to yourself is all I ask," the letter ran, "and know

that whatever you may decide as best for yourself that shall I abide by."

Following the serving of the papers on Will for absolute divorce, I left town. Those wretched days were spent on railroad trains, fast trains, flyers. I got off one only to board another. The sense of "going somewhere" was in keeping with my mood. When I returned to New York, worn and relaxed, I appreciated the quiet of what once had been home. . . . Will had already installed himself at the club. The dismantling of the apartment was a nerve-racking task. Memories, bitter, sweet, crowded on each other's heels, "so fast they followed." Will had left a list of books and trinkets which were to be packed and sent to storage in his name. In an old trunk, buried beneath dust and grime in the bin, below stairs, I found endless souvenirs of my married life. Photographs, letters, my wedding flowers; press-notices, carefully preserved in a large scrap-book; costumes I had made for Will in the early days of our struggle; Boy's first shoe. . . . This inscription on the back of a large photograph Will had given to me on the day of our betrothal: "To Girlie from her Boy—until death do us part

and even in eternity." . . . Letters, breathing hope and fears and always—love. . . . Damp with tears, I gathered the symbols of the wreck and plied a match. I watched them as they burned . . and crumbled to ashes . . ashes. . . .

* * * * * *

I sat in the rear of the dim theatre where I had slipped unnoticed, after the lights were lowered. I had come to see him as a kind of leave-taking. Tomorrow, the open sea . . a new world. . . . His voice thrilled me as before: I smiled at familiar little tricks and mannerisms. . . . His features had coarsened somewhat; his figure taken on flesh, but it was the same Will . . the same handsome lover of my youth. The scene faded from my view. . . . I lived again in the past; all rancour dead, a great tenderness and regret—regret that it should be so. Silently I stole away, while the lights were low. "God bless you, dear," I whispered in my heart, "God bless and keep you, dear."

THE END

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